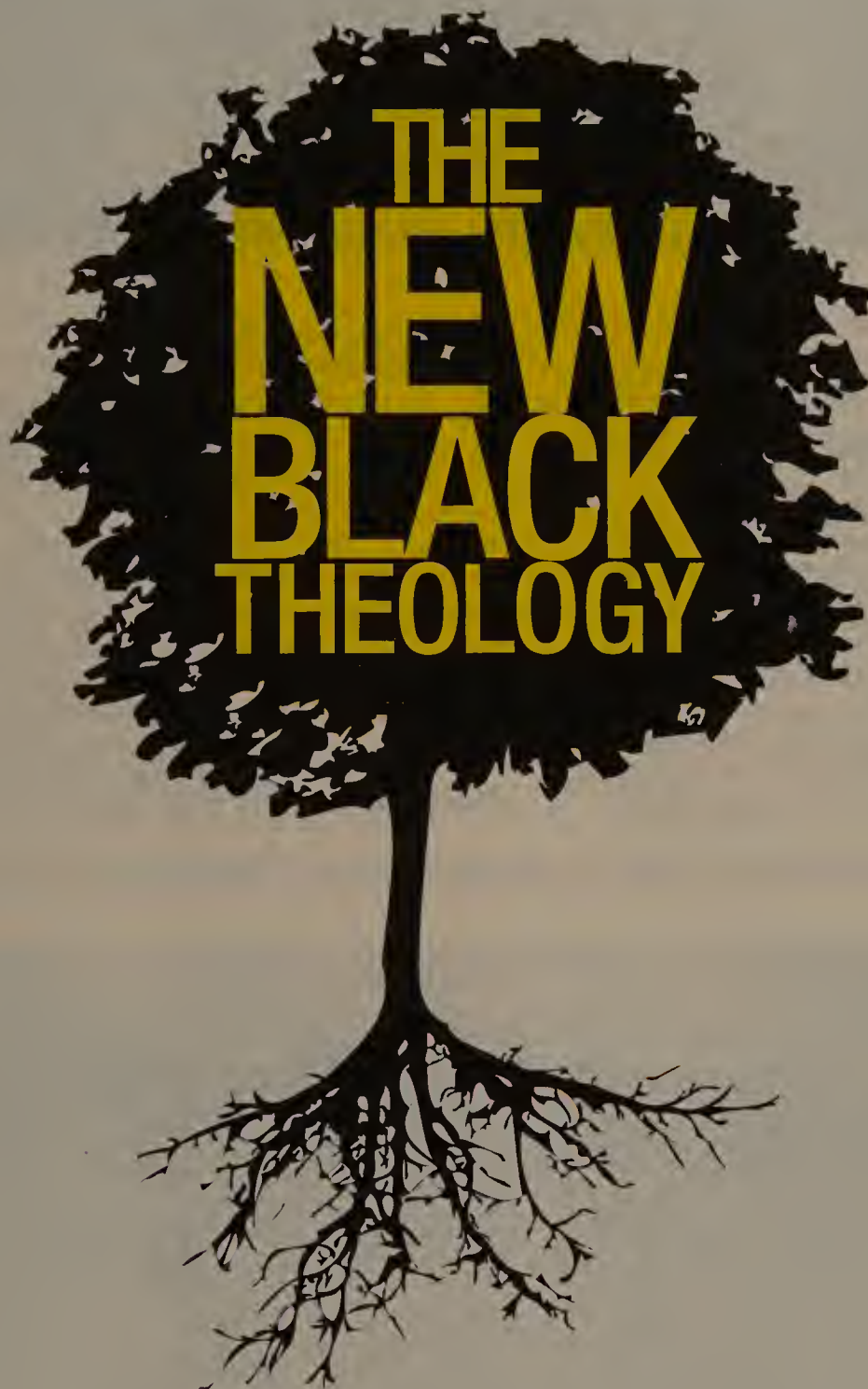


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Sara Miles is the founder and director of the food pantry and director of ministry at Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. She is the author of *Jesus Freak: Feeding, Healing, Raising the Dead* and *Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion*. She is a noted speaker, preacher and workshop leader nationally and her writing has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, and on National Public Radio.

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Beginnings and endings

AFTER 48 YEARS as a minister of word and sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), I will retire at the end of January. I have tried not to become caught in the “oh-my-gosh-it’s-the-last-time-I-will-do-this” syndrome, and I succeeded until Epiphany Sunday, a day when our church celebrates baptism. Infant baptisms may be the best part of being a minister. For one thing, I love babies. Although my wife and I had five of them, the truth is that I had never been around an infant until she delivered one. I recall feeling a powerful sense of wonder and awe when I held that first baby, and I have not forgotten that feeling. When that baby was born, fathers were an unwanted nuisance in the birth process. We were relegated to the fathers’ waiting room, where we chain-smoked and read old *Field and Stream* magazines. When our fifth child was born, however, it was a more enlightened time. Fathers were active participants and were allowed to be present in the delivery room. Now I think back to those births and look forward to baptisms. Each time I hold an infant, I remember old Simeon holding baby Jesus in the temple and saying, “O Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace for my eyes have seen thy salvation” (KJV). It isn’t salvation I’m holding, of course, but I’m holding a child, and that child is future and hope.

Some of the babies are dressed in gowns that are family heirlooms; some wear corduroys and sweaters; one little boy wore a miniature white tuxedo complete with bow tie. Parents are worried that their infants will do something embarrassing, which they almost always do: they wriggle, scream for their

parents, burp and throw up, smile beatifically at the minister, survey the congregation like royalty, and grab the minister’s glasses or nose. In my tradition, the minister says the child’s name followed by, “You are a child of God, sealed by the Spirit in your baptism, and you belong to Jesus Christ forever,” to which one two-year-old recently responded, “Uh-oh.” It was an appropriate response, I thought, because beyond its attendant humanness, and the simple cuteness of the baby, is a stunning theological affirmation. God loves us apart from anything we have done or neglected to do; God loves us apart from our theological sophistication or lack of it; God loves us when we are weak and vulnerable and totally dependent; God loves us not because of anything about us other than the fact that we are, we have being and we bear within us the image of the One who created us. It is enough. It is worth celebrating.

Later that week I was present at the bedside when a church member died—a vital, bright, successful businessman who loved his family, fine wine and good food. His wife and family made the difficult decision to remove life support when there was no hope for recovery. We held hands around his bed and stumbled through the 23rd Psalm. I thanked God for the man’s good life and commended him to God’s care, then we watched as two ICU nurses, with great sensitivity and dignity, removed life support tubes.

In the midst of a flurry of retirement activities, I have been given reminders of what church is about and what ministry is, and I am grateful.

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LETTERS

Communion invitation

I resonate with Andrew Packman's experience of the Eucharist in a Catholic church in the Balkans ("Table manners," Jan. 11). During a ministry of 40 years, I have studied, worked, lectured, preached or traveled in 27 countries. My experience is that the Catholic Church is not nearly as monolithic and exclusive as the American church likes to portray itself as being.

I have been invited by priests not just to receive the Eucharist but also to celebrate it—in northern Italy, in Jerusalem and in, of all places, Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I suspect that the American church tends to perpetuate an image of exclusiveness because it thinks it can afford to, and that this is a characteristic of wealthy societies and a church that fears not being in control. In other parts of the world, like the Balkans, the Eucharist becomes a matter of outreach, driven from within by the gospel message.

If the church was more about outreach and less about control, we would grow in fellowship and faith.

*Ralph E. Nelson
Helena, Mont.*

To begin with, the Eucharist is never taken; it is received. Second, Catholic communion is closed for a reason. To receive the Eucharist when one does not accept that it is the True Presence is to profess something that one does not believe, thus endangering one's immortal soul. Finally, Packman's article smacks of an adolescent dare. "Look at me, I'm doing something I'm not supposed to." To receive the Eucharist as some form of Protestant protest strikes me as immature.

*Shaune Kelly Scott
christiancentury.org comment*

Humor under pressure . . .

Thanks for "Living my truth" (Jan. 11), Amy Frykholm's interview with Amy DeLong. And thanks to DeLong for her

sense of humor and integrity; thanks also to her trial court for introducing a creative approach to this troubling denominational problem. The United Methodist Church is not the only denomination that can benefit from a new look at gay marriages.

I can see Jesus applauding what is happening here. In his answer to the Pharisees who placed the woman caught in adultery before him, he showed a similar sense of humor.

*Annabel B. Clark
Denver, Colo.*

Team of rivals . . .

I read Christina Braudaway-Bauman's "Peer power" (Jan. 11) with interest. I have been ordained for over 20 years. A few years ago I was invited to join a Bailant group designed for clergy. It's an interfaith group, which adds to its richness. The format allows participants to develop a deep relationship with other participants, but at the same time forces participants to consider the experience of those to whom they minister.

I am thankful for my Bailant colleagues, for their honesty and their commitment to growing as individuals and clergy.

*Jon Fogle
christiancentury.org comment*

Correction . . .

In my review of Stanley Hauerwas's book *War and the American Difference* (Jan. 25), one sentence was incorrect. It should have read: "As a student of both Hauerwas and Yoder, I confess to ongoing wrestling with the idea that nonviolence goes with the grain of the universe, for I think this is ultimately the most compelling theological argument to be made for Christian pacifism and against just war."

*Tobias Winright
St. Louis, Mo.*

February 8, 2012

The diplomatic option

The Republican candidates for the presidential nomination can't resist "taking on" Iran. "If we reelect Barack Obama," Mitt Romney says, "Iran will have a nuclear weapon. And if we elect Mitt Romney . . . they will not have a nuclear weapon." Rick Santorum promises to bomb Iran if it doesn't dismantle its nuclear reactor in Qom. This makes for good campaign rhetoric, since its aim is to make President Obama look weak.

For his part, President Obama seems to want to avoid military confrontation with Iran. Along with Congress, he has opted for stronger economic sanctions against it. But this strategy backs Iran into a corner, making it even more resolved to develop a nuclear program. In response, Iran warns that it could shut down the Strait of Hormuz, which would choke off many of the region's oil exports. This would lead to a catastrophe of another kind: soaring gas prices and a plummeting world economy. It would also likely ensure that Obama would be a one-term president.

There is another option, the diplomatic route. As Iranian expert Trita Parsi has pointed out, the U.S. did enter into diplomatic talks with Iran in 2009. The talks broke down because the U.S. was seeking quick results and didn't have the patience to endure for the long haul. Only six months later, Turkey and Brazil picked up the baton and were able to get Iran to agree to what the U.S. wanted: exchange of its low-enriched uranium for fuel to be used in a medical research reactor. But the agreement came too late for the U.S., which had already moved to strengthen sanctions against Iran.

The U.S. could learn from the Turkey-Brazil efforts, says Parsi. As one Turkish official said, "When you put intimidation and coercion ahead of respect, it falls apart. Iran listens because we respect them." Turkey and Brazil realized the complexity of negotiating with Iran and chose to talk with all the power brokers in the country, not just the people at the top. They also broadened the agenda beyond Iran's nuclear ambitions to include issues like human rights—and negotiated the release of a French prisoner. This action has particular salience since Iran recently accused an American-born prisoner of espionage and condemned him to death.

The U.S. might also press for a nuclear-free Middle East. This would require Israel to admit that it has nuclear weapons and then to give them up, a seemingly impossible task. Yet a majority of Israelis favor a nuclear-free Middle East. Many Arab countries would favor such a plan as well, since they're nervous about both Israeli and Iranian intentions.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently admitted that the U.S. is considering opening talks with the Taliban (backdoor conversations are already happening). If the U.S. can talk with the much-despised Taliban, why can't it talk with Iran?

In 2009, U.S. talks with Iran broke down because the U.S. was seeking quick results. It's time to try again.

CENTURY marks

TEACHER, TEACHER: A longitudinal study that followed students from fourth grade into adulthood gives empirical proof that good (or bad) teachers do make a difference. Having a good teacher in the fourth grade alone increases by 1.25 percent the likelihood that a student will go to college and decreases the chance by the same amount that a female student as a teenager will get pregnant. Having a very poor teacher is tantamount to a student's missing 40 percent of the school year, an intolerable truancy rate. Nicholas D. Kristof notes that the quality of public school education is hardly getting any notice in the primary campaigns. Improving the quality of education may be the most essential strategy for the nation's economic development and job creation in the future (*New York Times*, January 11).

STRIKE A CHORD: Choral singing is the most popular and durable arts-related participatory activity in the United States.

Nationally 28.5 million people sing in one or more of about 250,000 chorus groups. There may be mental and physiological reasons for this: singing, particularly in groups, makes people happy. While singing releases endorphins, the feel-good chemical of the brain, choral singing has the greatest effect on people's happiness. In an Australian study in 2008 choral singers on average expressed greater happiness than the general public, even when those singers were carrying greater burdens than the average person not singing in choirs. The benefits of choral singing in particular come from the fact that it is a social activity, which gives people a sense of belonging and combats loneliness (TLC.com).

WHICH FAITH? Tim Tebow, quarterback for the Denver Broncos, is known for his public expressions of faith and his come-from-behind (some say miraculous) victories. After *Saturday Night Live* lampooned Tebow, Pat Robertson said it was an example of anti-Christian bigotry.

Marcus Cederstrom asks: "What if Tebow were Muslim?" Would he then be revered by many and tolerated by most others? Cederstrom points to two examples: Chris Jackson's Mississippi home was burned after he converted to Islam and changed his name to Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf; when Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali) resisted the draft during the Vietnam War because of his newfound faith, his championship belt was taken away, and for four years he was not allowed to fight (*Salon*, January 12).

MORMONS ON MORMONS: Though Mitt Romney, Jon Huntsman and Harry Reid all belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, their coreligionists view them very differently. According to Pew research, 86 percent of Mormons see Romney in a favorable light, 50 percent view Huntsman positively and only 22 percent give Reid a thumbs-up. About three-fourths of Mormons are Republican or lean in that direction, which may explain the low ranking given to Democratic Reid. Romney is an active lay leader in his Mormon congregation and refuses to distance himself from the LDS Church (*Christian Science Monitor*, January 12).

CLASS WARFARE? Americans are almost equally divided between thinking the rich are wealthy because they were fortunate enough to be born into money or have the right connections (46 percent) and thinking that the rich are wealthy due to hard work, ambition or education (43 percent) (*USA Today*, January 11).

SLIPPERY SLOPE: According to Cullen Murphy (*God's Jury: The Inquisition and the Making of the Modern World*), the



church did no worse in using torture than modern states, and there is some evidence to show that the church behaved better. The church put limits on the use of torture: how severe and how often, when it could be used and by whom. But the limits could be stretched. If a second session of torture was prohibited, its use was sometimes construed as the continuance of a previous session (*American Scholar*, Winter).

FROM SAVAGE TO TERRORIST:

Americans like to think of themselves as compassionate and generous, and they often are. But when it comes to the casualties in other countries caused by U.S. wars, says John Tirman, Americans tend to be ignorant at best and callous at worst. By one estimate, American wars since 1945 have taken the lives of 6 million people, both civilians and soldiers. An early 2007 poll asked Americans how many Iraqis had died in the Iraq War. Their average answer was nearly 10,000 when in fact the actual number was in the hundreds of thousands. Historian Richard Slotkin says this neglect of casualties on the other side stems from what he calls the "the frontier myth." This is the notion that righteous violence is justified to subdue or annihilate savage peoples. Today we call them terrorists (*Washington Post*, January 8).

UNKNOWN ENDINGS: George Kennan was arguably the greatest U.S. foreign policy analyst of the 20th century. He devised the containment doctrine in relation to the Soviet Union, a middle ground between war and diplomacy. When the U.S. was moving toward invading Iraq, Kennan warned: "War has a momentum of its own, and it carries you away from all thoughtful intentions when you get into it. Today, if we went into Iraq, like the president would like us to do, you know where you begin. You never know where you are going to end" (*Foreign Affairs*, January/February).

THE SUFI AND QADDAFI: In 1969 Libya's Colonel Muammar Qaddafi deposed King Idris, leader of Sanusi, a Sufi Islamic order, in a bloodless coup. The modern state of Libya was born

“Jesus never played football and is not known to have ever worked out. (He didn’t even swim, preferring to walk on water.)”

— Jon Meacham, writing on the American penchant for blending sports and faith, in an article on Tim Tebow, evangelical quarterback for the Denver Broncos (*Time*, January 16)

“[T]he new proposal for Department of Defense base budget reductions over the next five years represents only a 4 percent decline in real, or inflation-adjusted, terms, according to the Project on Defense Alternatives. And the Pentagon’s budget will remain far larger than it was ten years ago. On top of this, all of these calculations exclude, as they should not, billions in funding for the current wars.”

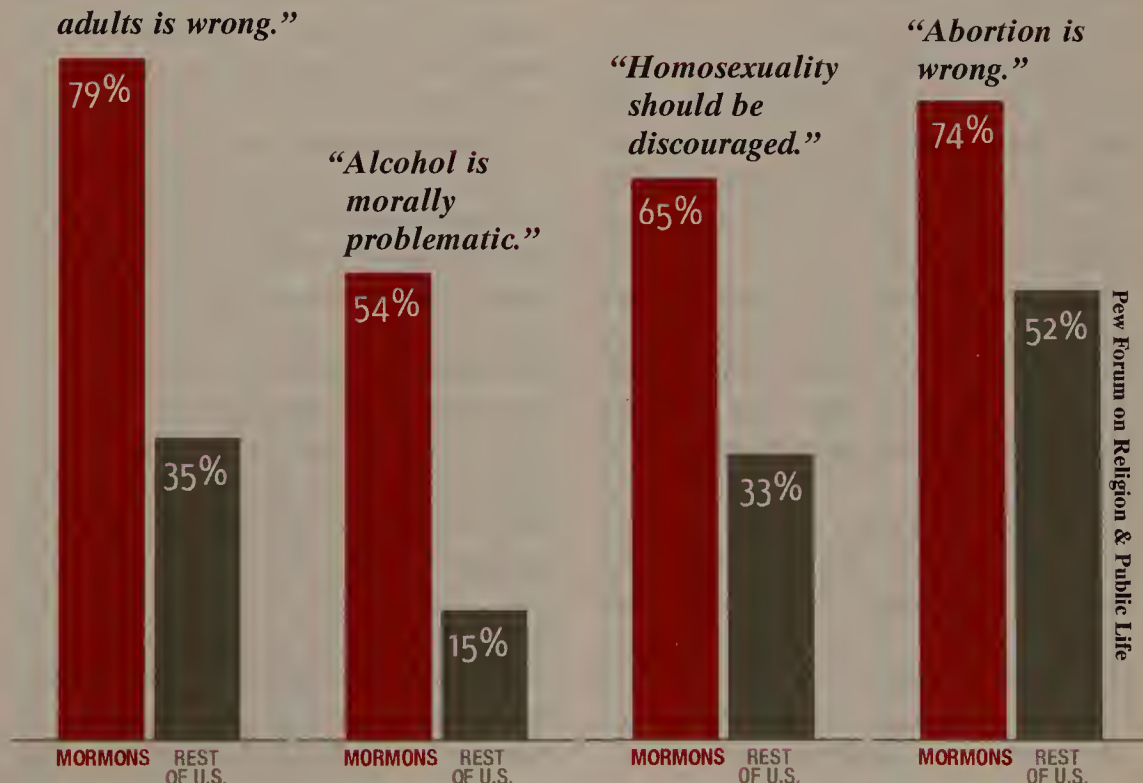
— Catherine Lutz, Brown University professor and editor of *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*, commenting on the Obama administration’s purported claim for a smaller, more agile Defense Department (Institute for Public Accuracy, January 5)

after World War II with the aid of the British government. The chief negotiator for the British was Norman Anderson, an evangelical missionary with impeccable skills in Arabic. Anderson had a deep respect for Islam that was not typical of conservative Christians in his era. He developed a relationship with King Idris and helped him forge modern-day Libya (*History Today*, December).

DEAD RINGER: In a video shown by the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Burbank, California, congregants are reminded to turn off all cell phones and all electronic and messaging devices. The video warns that a fee of \$25 will be assessed for a cell phone that goes off during announcements, \$50 if it goes off during prayer concerns. Anyone whose phone goes off during the sermon . . . is going to hell (YouTube.com).

“Sex between unmarried adults is wrong.”

THE MORMON DIFFERENCE



How meeting agendas get hijacked

An elephant in the room?

by Bradley N. Hill

WHEN ARE WE going to talk about the elephant in the room?" asked Susannah. Members of the church council looked at each other. "What elephant?" each person thought. Nobody wanted to seem dense and admit that he didn't see an elephant.

"The pastor was seen with another woman in a restaurant over on Fifth Street," Susannah volunteered. "Two women from our church were out shopping and looked in the restaurant window and saw them. He had his hand over hers and their heads were close together. One of the women pulled out her cell phone

By "elephant in the room," one generally means a huge and hot topic present that is so volatile everyone tacitly agrees to ignore it. The elephant is an obvious but hard truth that is not being addressed, in part because to face, name and own the related issue would be frightening. Honesty becomes taboo. No one wants to cause embarrassment. The group prefers avoidance and feigned ignorance to bold but painful confrontation. It is a form of denial.

Certainly there is sometimes a serious issue that's being avoided. But in many cases, shouting "Elephant in the room!"

others are unwilling to take risks or wrestle with the beast.

As a result, the elephant crier takes over the meeting and the elephant—whatever it is, however big or small—defines the terms of engagement. We must deal with the elephant before we can do anything else. The elephant crier usurps the agenda and owns the floor. He or she may plunge ahead or back off with "I don't know how to deal with it, but I felt somebody had to out the elephant." Either way, any other discussion is cut off because of the urgency of the "new" issue.

Some of the elephants I've met include:

- declining membership
- poor preaching
- missing generations
- unresolved personal conflicts
- unaddressed sin issues (pastor, staff and members)
- pastoral attire
- poor tech
- dwindling choir
- weakening finances
- erratic follow-up
- failure to deal with difficult personalities

Shouting "Elephant in the room!" is an attempt by one or more persons to control the agenda.

and snapped the picture." Susannah passed the photo around.

"There might be an elephant in this room," retorted another council member, "but it's not the pastor and this woman. That's his sister in the photo. I happen to know she was just diagnosed with breast cancer."

The *real* elephant in this meeting was gossip, a church culture that tolerated it, and the lack of a carefully formed agenda that would have dealt with a serious issue before it came up as melodramatic and even untrue.

Yet time and time again in various pastorates, I hear about elephants in the room. One night, after yet another announcement of an elephant's appearance, I quipped, "How do you know it's an elephant? Maybe it's an aardvark."

is an attempt by one person or several people to control the agenda and to avoid other, lesser, lurking creatures—like aardvarks.

It begins when one person "cries elephant," often following that announcement with "We need to tell the truth here" or "Where are the truth tellers?" or "Who's going to admit that the emperor has no clothes?" The person who cries elephant startles everyone else into submission: in a reactionary move, they elevate the "crier" to the status of courageous truth teller. Only he or she, it's implied, is bold enough to name the unnamable; the others are ostriches with their heads in sand. The crier is perceptive and insightful; the others are willfully blind. The crier has what it takes to "man up" and name the problem; the

Then there's a diagnosis. The problem is not just declining membership, for example. It's that membership is declining because of the music or the lack of maintenance. It's not just the poor preaching; it's poor because it's not "expository" in nature. The younger generation is not just missing; its members are missing because they don't have a youth room. All too quickly, assumptions are made about the issue, its root causes and its oh-so-obvious solution.

The board of a developmental organization in an African country was working through a long agenda and addressing how to fund road repair, build bridges and come up with marketing strategies for a “majority world” economy. Suddenly a board member put down his pad with a thump. “This discussion is a waste of time until we address the elephant in the room.” The board members looked at each other. They thought they were already discussing some elephants,

well.” It’s a power play when a speaker declares in advance that his or her words will be crucial. With this setup, the other people in the room are in the position of having to contradict the speaker if he or she overstates something. Why not just present the case and let them respond freely to the truth and content?

I might try this at the next national church assembly. I would take the mic on the floor and after being recognized

the importance of my opinion, I create an elephant. The delegates would have to hold back their snickers out of respect for me—after all, I’m an ordained pastor and hold a doctoral degree. They would wonder what was wrong with me, but they wouldn’t say it. They’d be forced to discuss my motion—carefully—instead of other key and urgent concerns.

What if, you ask, there’s a real elephant in the room—a huge, potentially destructive issue that must be immediately addressed? Unlike the situations I’ve described here, serious, embedded issues are communally discerned and identified. It is rarely the prerogative of an individual to decide what the problem is. After all, dangerous elephants don’t suddenly, stealthily and invisibly tiptoe into the room. They have histories and leave trails. When I lived in the Congo, I sometimes crossed elephant paths. They’re hard to miss. An elephant mashes flat everything in its path. With carefully honored agendas and an alert council, leaders will observe the trails and the issue will find its way to the front.

Proper agenda formation is key. “Proper” does not mean a list of things

Good agenda formation will always include congregational input.

as well as hippos and gorillas. But the elephant crier forged ahead. “We cannot move forward until we deal with the president. He is hard to work with, and he’s mishandling our funds.”

This was not news. Those present knew that the president was difficult to work with—some of this due to cultural conflicts and differences—and the apparent mishandling of funds had been a point of disagreement with previous presidents as well as the current one. So, although what was needed was a steady and informed watch on these issues, the board found its own agenda aborted and spent the rest of the time talking about the president. The elephant in the room turned out to be the elephant crier.

In a church leadership meeting, we shared prayer requests, then bowed our heads and prepared to pray. Suddenly an older man said, “I don’t think we should pray until we address the elephant in the room.” We all dutifully raised our heads and opened our eyes. “Is our youth pastor gay?” he asked. He pointed to the youth pastor’s recently acquired earring as the telltale sign. This may have been an elephant for that man, but he was the only one with that perspective. Crying elephant is often an attempt to bolster one’s rather thin position. It is tantamount to saying, “I am speaking for many others as

as Dr. Bradley Hill from Vancouver, Washington, I would say to the delegates, “What I am about to say will hit you like a tsunami. Rarely have I experienced such transforming power in such a small book. It will rock your world. If you don’t read *Who Moved My Cheese?* you are missing the opportunity of a lifetime. I move that the denomination buy a copy for everyone here.” I didn’t use the word *elephant*, but it’s the same idea. When I declare

Miserere

*If I were alone in a desert and feeling afraid,
I would like a child with me.*

—Meister Eckhart

Across the basin
the blue of mountains, beyond
those waves still more. Not

rollers and not clouds, they are
animals waking from sleep,

catching a scent, trace
of the child who, over seas,
picks up a bone flute,

draws breath, and like a light wind,
a dawn wind, begins to play.

Bradley N. Hill is a minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church.

Steve Lautermilch

the pastor or chairperson thinks the council should discuss, jotted down in haste and sent by e-mail the night before a meeting. Not all participants will read such an e-mail. Finally, in desperation, somebody interrupts this agenda and yells elephant just to get the attention of everyone in the room.

Good agenda formation, in contrast, begins at the end of the previous meet-

ing. "What do we need to put on the agenda for next month?" This approach allows all members to consider the bigger picture as well as the nagging items of mundane business. If an urgent issue surfaces, any member can ask for it to be included.

Good agenda formation also has ways and means for congregational input. The committees all have a proce-

dures for bringing issues to the table. Sometimes this process results in a preliminary agenda that's long and unwieldy. When this happens, the chair sends it out and asks for prioritization, once again giving control of the agenda to the group.

That's when good things happen: real elephants rise to the top and are dealt with effectively. CC

Ministry with young adults in flux

No need for church

by Adam J. Copeland

WITHIN THE METRO area of Fargo, North Dakota, and Moorhead, Minnesota, are scores of vital mainline churches. So why are 45,000 young adults—close to a quarter of the entire population—not connected to any of them?

In economic terms, it's not a supply-side issue; there's simply no demand for church from the young adults. In my new call as developer of young adult ministry in the Fargo-Moorhead area, I've been meeting and talking with young adults in area pubs and coffee shops. After only a dozen conversations, it became clear that what many mainline churches here offer—the worship, the programs, the intergenerational community—fails to connect with many in their twenties and thirties. Perhaps this was predictable, but for me, a 28-year-old pastor called to work with other young adults, it's been a troubling discovery.

My faith was nourished by a historic downtown Presbyterian congregation and then pushed, prodded and deep-

ened at a church-related college. I sensed a call to ordained ministry and attended seminary. But the more I talked with young unchurched adults, the more disconnected I felt from church as I'd known it all my life. After having ministered to me so well, the same church seems ill equipped to be

in a variety of settings. But she is not connected to a congregation.

A young man described how he had hoped to be a youth pastor in his conservative evangelical denomination, but then the rigid faith he was taught at Bible college sent him into a crisis of faith. Now his questions about the Bible,

It's not that emerging adults are antagonistic toward the church; they're indifferent to it.

church for the young people I'm meeting. In my confusion, I've decided to resort to an old pastors' trick: I listen a lot and talk very little.

A young woman told me that she too had grown up in a loving Lutheran church but felt pushed out when she revealed her sexuality. She now prays regularly, attends spirituality retreats at a Catholic ministry center and volunteers

and about piety and certain theological doctrines, make him feel unwelcome in the church of his youth—and uninspired to try another church.

A young woman explained that she planned to live in Fargo for only a year. She felt that it wasn't worth expending the time she'd need to get connected to a congregation but wished she had a place where she could ask faith-related ques-

tions, a place where she might grow in her love of God and neighbor.

As I began to knit together these conversations, I also began to rethink the collective mission of the Protestant congregations in Fargo-Moorhead. What I was hearing, over and over again, was not a longing to become connected to an established congregation, but a longing for a space in which nascent faith could be nurtured without judgment. I had to be honest: most congregations in town would have a hard time meeting these young adults at the appropriate place on their faith journey. Church programs, Sunday school classes, choir practices, committee meetings and potlucks are fine, but they are not compelling to someone simply looking to chat about whether God matters.

The young adults I've come to know are not antagonistic toward the church. They convey not an aversion to historic congregations but a collective indifference, a "whatever." Yes, some are looking for strong established congregations. In my experience these young adults are married, have young children, own a home, are employed and plan to stay in the area for some time. They fit the stereotype of what young adults are supposed to do in their late twenties and early thirties. I'm grateful that many congregations in town are willing and ready to welcome them with open arms.

But other emerging adults don't know their life goals. They hope to move soon, and they work three part-time jobs, all of which they hate. They live with roommates, are "freaked out" by the idea of having children and, as one young adult said, they "live in constant flux." These people don't fit in with the population of most mainline churches in town. With the questions they bring and the tattoos they wear, congregations are unsure how to attract them to their churches and, even if they are successful, what to do with them once they're inside.

Where does this leave a pastor who was formed by and loves the traditional church but who also seeks to do faithful ministry with these emerging adults? With God's stirring, I believe that together we are beginning to glimpse a new vision for ministry.

One essential aspect of this ministry is space for young people to address questions of faith, life and ethics in public settings. We've realized that our forums—and this is key—should not focus on delivering an "expert answer" from some theologically trained stranger. Instead, they must allow participants to listen to one another, to form friendships and to relax in the beauty of holy conversation.

Some have said that for young adults "conversation is authority." We trust, in these carefully designed spaces of dialogue, that the Spirit is at work as we take up Wendell Berry's invitation to "Be like the fox / who makes more tracks than necessary, / some in the wrong direction."

As a pastor I still struggle to adapt. Take the biweekly Theology Pub session that we host in the basement of a restaurant. In seminary, I dutifully learned the

in my new call, however, I've had to reflect on worship's "insider" nature and consider how to create worship opportunities that are welcoming to "outsiders" by being more open and unassuming. I'm ready to embrace alternative ways to pray and to praise the Lord. As one example, I'm curating an evening worship experience that includes interactive prayer stations, conversation about a scripture passage and celebration of the Lord's Supper, even as I offer thanks for the church organs that sound Sunday morning all over town.

In my view, what we're creating here is not church in the traditional sense of the word, but a *ministry of the church*. Just as many congregations support demographic-based ministries like campus ministry, homeless ministry and addiction ministry, so we now need to

If we really want to reach emerging adults, we will have to support ministries that focus on them.

orthodox theology of my denomination. But among young adults at Theology Pub, my claim that "John Calvin says this . . ." would be as verboten as requiring Lutheran pastors to preach works righteousness. In this space, I've found it necessary—and ultimately rewarding—to be open and honest with my questions, to always be a partner in the conversation and to avoid being someone who is grasping for authority. I host Theology Pub, but I'm a sheep, not the shepherd. Most congregations would not allow me to be in this new role; my group requires it.

I've also grappled with the common refrain I hear when I ask emerging adults about worship: they don't like it, or at least they don't like what they imagine when they hear the word *worship*. The dozens with whom I've spoken simply choose not to attend.

Again, this barrier between young adults and congregations disturbs me. After all, I serve on the Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song and am engaged in helping develop my denomination's next hymnal. Given my experiences

support ministry to emerging adults. Some sociologists say such young adults are in an "extended adolescence" that lasts past the college years. Whether we agree or disagree with these findings, we know that most young adults in our communities are not in our churches. If we really want to reach them, those of us in traditional congregations will have to support a ministry that focuses on them.

It won't be easy. I know how to give three-point sermons and visit shut-ins, but a new ministry with emerging adults requires a creative knack that I may not have. (I know that God loves organ music—but interactive prayer stations?) I'm grateful that when I become overwhelmed, something or someone always reminds me that I'm not called to bring God to young adults. As I listen to the stories of their lives, I sense that God is already at work. But will the church catch and claim this vision?



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Justices uphold church hire-fire rights

The U.S. Supreme Court has unanimously thrown its support behind a church school that fired a teacher, using a widely watched church-state case to bolster a legal doctrine that exempts religious institutions from some civil rights laws.

Many religious groups heralded the January 11 ruling as a firm assertion of religious freedom that keeps personnel decisions about religious employees where they should be: within a church, synagogue or mosque.

Nevertheless, the 9-0 ruling supporting a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod church and school in Michigan drew different reactions from two leading groups concerned with First Amendment issues.

"It is a helpful decision explaining the important and unique way that the Constitution protects religious organizations in matters of internal governance," said K. Hollyn Hollman, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee.

The BJC filed an amicus brief in the case, urging that the High Court explicitly recognize the so-called ministerial exception, a principle commonly recognized in lower courts. The National Council of Churches and the National Association of Evangelicals joined the BJC in its brief.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State, however, said the Supreme Court set the bar far too high for employees of religious institutions who seek redress against discrimination.

"The really terrible thing about this decision is that if you fire someone and religion is just a pretext, it can't be addressed by courts," said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "It's just a gigantic new exception, a new loophole to the civil rights law for religious groups that will not be shut in a very long time—if ever."

The case of the now-closed Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School in Redford, Michigan, revolved around Cheryl Perich. She had been elevated by the Lutheran church that ran the school to a "called teacher" position, one with some religious responsibilities. Though most of her duties were secular, Perich spent part of each day teaching religion and sometimes led chapel services.

Diagnosed with a sleep disorder, Perich took a leave of absence in 2004 and was replaced by another teacher. Cleared by her doctors to return to work, the church refused to reinstate her.

Perich filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, arguing that the school was hiding behind its religious protections to ignore the Americans with Disabilities Act. The EEOC ruled for Perich, but she lost a lawsuit against the school in federal court in 2008.

The school successfully argued that the doctrine of ministerial exception gave it broad hiring and firing powers over all religious employees, even if they were engaged in nonreligious activities. Lawyers for the school maintained that the Lutheran tradition requires that disagreements within the church be settled within it and that Perich had flouted this requirement by going to court.

Perich appealed, and in 2010 the Cincinnati-based Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in her favor. The Supreme Court, in an opinion written by Chief Justice John Roberts, gave the final victory to the church, grounding the decision in the First Amendment's guarantees of free exercise of religion and a prohibition on government establishment of religion. Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito and Elena Kagan filed concurring opinions.



UNANIMOUS DECISION: After hearing arguments in a case that pits government antidiscrimination laws against the autonomy of religious groups to hire and fire employees on the basis of religion, the U.S. Supreme Court voted 9-0 in a decision affirming a "ministerial exception" that upholds religious groups' right to choose or dismiss their employees.

"The interest of society in the enforcement of employment discrimination statutes is undoubtedly important. But so too is the interest of religious groups in choosing who will preach their beliefs, teach their faith, and carry out their mission," Roberts wrote. "The First Amendment has struck the balance for us. The church must be free to choose those who will guide it on its way."

Matthew C. Harrison, president of the 2.3-million-member Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which has many parochial schools, said the denomination was "delighted" that the Supreme Court confirmed "a critical religious liberty in our country."

"The court hasn't spoken this clearly on a church-state matter in almost 20 years," said Richard Garnett, a law professor at the University of Notre Dame who wrote an amicus brief on the case in support of the church and school. "This is bedrock," Garnett continued. "All the justices came together to say if religious freedom means anything, it means governments can't interfere with religious institutions' decisions on who is going to be their minister or teacher." —RNS, ABP

Romney's evangelical hurdle starts with core theology

Good news for Mitt Romney: he won the New Hampshire GOP primary. Bad news for Romney: evangelicals remain reluctant to support him. Rick Santorum got 35 more votes than Romney in Iowa although no official winner was declared because of missing ballots from eight precincts. In addition, Rick Perry, an evangelical favorite before his campaign gaffes, bowed out shortly before the South Carolina primary, leaving evangelicals a choice of Santorum or Newt Gingrich as an alternate to Romney.

In Iowa, just 14 percent of evangelicals supported the former Massachusetts governor, according to entrance polls—a third less than he won during his 2008 campaign. Steve Scheffler, president of the Iowa Faith and Freedom Coalition,



ROMNEY EFFECT: A Mormon in the White House would bring new levels of scrutiny from Republicans uneasy about the faith of the LDS Church.

said Romney failed to convince evangelicals that he cares about their issues, particularly outlawing abortion and same-sex marriage.

"What evangelicals are saying is: We don't know what this guy believes," Scheffler said. "Does he have any public policy philosophy other than wanting to be elected president?"

Yet numerous polls and anti-Mormon statements suggest that deeper disagreements rooted in core elements of Christian theology are also in play.

A prominent Texas pastor (and Rick Perry supporter) has called Mormonism a non-Christian cult. A Florida pastor says a vote for Romney is "a vote for Satan." The associate publisher of a leading evangelical magazine said a Romney presidency would "normalize the false teachings of Mormonism." A former staffer for Newt Gingrich's campaign said thousands of evangelical pastors stand ready to "expose the cult of Mormon."

Romney has acknowledged that his lifelong membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will cost him some votes. He told the *New York Times* in December that "most people don't decide who they're going to vote for based on the religion that they happen to be a member of. But there will be some for whom that's an issue, and I won't get those votes in some cases."

The number could be as high as 15 percent among white evangelicals, according to a November poll by the nonpartisan

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. That may not prevent Romney from winning the GOP nomination, but it could mean that millions of evangelicals will stay home during the general election.

"Evangelicals have come to regard the presidency as a spiritually potent office," said Mark Silk, an expert on religion and politics at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. "And the idea of electing someone who will use it on behalf of a religion they consider beyond the pale really bothers them."

All of which begs the question: Why does Mormonism makes some evangelicals uneasy?

"At root, this is a theological argument," said Patrick Mason, a professor of Mormon studies at Claremont Graduate University in California. Among the disputes are the nature of God, the doctrine of the Trinity and the acceptance of revelations and books beyond the Christian Bible.

"For the people on the inside of these kinds of discussions, these are not just matters of life and death but of salvation. There is nothing more important for them than having a proper relation to God and an idea of who Jesus is," said Mason, author of *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South*.

In a sense, Mormons and mainstream Christians have been at odds for nearly 200 years, Mason said. Mormonism's founding prophet, Joseph Smith, said God told him that every existing church and creed was

“corrupt” and “wrong.” Drawing on personal revelations—published in the Book of Mormon and other texts—Smith set out to restore the church.

Smith preached fairly orthodox Christian theology at first but “became increasingly radical, breaking more and

more from standard Christianity with every year that he lived,” said Craig Blomberg, a professor at Denver Seminary who has been active in evangelical-Mormon dialogue.

A sermon Smith preached three months before his death in 1844 planted

the seeds for Mormonism’s biggest break with traditional Christianity, according to scholars. In it, Smith preached that God was once a flesh-and-blood man who had attained godhood. Likewise, Smith taught, humans could advance to godlike status in heaven.

“It has become important for traditional Christians to maintain an unbridgeable creature-Creator chasm,” said Robert Millet, emeritus dean of religious education at Mormon-owned Brigham Young University in Utah. “For Latter-day Saints, God and man are the same species. God has substance—he is not just a force or power. He is an exalted, glorified man, and one of the purposes of the Gospels is to help us become what he is.”

The idea of humans becoming gods runs counter to mainstream Christianity, said Richard Mouw, president of the evangelical Fuller Theological Seminary. Confusing the two has traditionally been considered blasphemous, he said. Yet the Mormon idea does approach the Eastern Orthodox Christian notion of *theosis*, or partaking in the divine energies of God, said Mouw, a 20-year veteran of Mormon-evangelical dialogue.

The God-as-exalted-man doctrine has profound effects on other areas of Mormon theology, according to scholars. For example, Mormons believe that God has a celestial wife, to whom Jesus was born in a premortal existence.

“We believe that Jesus and all humanity had a life before this life,” Millet said, “and in that world, Christ was the eldest—Jesus was our elder brother.” Thus, Jesus is a step below God on the stairway to heaven—and not an equal member of the Trinity.

Traditional Christianity holds that God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit coexist and share one substance. Mormons “deny the [doctrine of the] Trinity, and that’s huge,” said Mouw.

But for all the theological fissures between Mormonism and evangelicals, some scholars say they have discovered a fair amount of common ground through dialogue. “We are so close in some respects that when we differ it can lead to inflammatory conversations,” Blomberg said. “It’s like a sibling rivalry.” —Daniel Burke, RNS

Pro-evolution project says faith and science are reconcilable

A BIOLOGIST with a scientific interest in evolution-creation debates attributed a poll saying that three-fourths of Protestant pastors reject evolution—and close to half believe the earth is about 6,000 years old—to a common but false idea that science and faith cannot be reconciled. The survey of 1,000 pastors, released in January, also said that 74 percent agreed that “Adam and Eve were literal people.”

Michael Zimmerman, academic vice president and provost at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, said he doubts that a representative sample of pastors was surveyed by LifeWay Research, an arm of the Southern Baptist Convention—citing, for example, the 73 percent who disagreed with the statement “I believe God used evolution to create people.”

Either way, Zimmerman said, “it is a shame that the respondents find that their religion demands that they turn away from the facts of the natural world.”

The good news, the biologist said, is that thousands of Christian clergy understand science in a way that poses no threat to their faith. Nearly 13,000 have signed an open letter affirming belief that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may comfortably coexist and supporting the teaching of evolution to children in public schools.

“We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests,” the letter says. To reject that truth or to treat it as “one theory among others,” the letter states, “is to deliberately em-

brace scientific ignorance and transmit such ignorance to our children.”

The letter continues: “To argue that God’s loving plan of salvation for humanity precludes the full employment of the God-given faculty of reason is to attempt to limit God, an act of hubris.”

Zimmerman said the Clergy Letter Project has been officially endorsed by groups including the United Methodist Church, the Southeast Florida Diocese of the Episcopal Church and the Southwestern Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Separate letters have come from Jewish rabbis and Unitarian Universalist clergy.

The Clergy Letter Project began in 2004 when Zimmerman worked with clergy in Wisconsin to prepare a statement in support of teaching evolution in response to a series of antievolution policies passed by the school board in Grantsburg, Wisconsin. A large response prompted Zimmerman to launch the project nationwide.

The group sponsors annual Evolution Weekend events on the weekend closest to Charles Darwin’s birthday, a date described by Zimmerman as “no better time to demonstrate the ways in which a mature and robust relationship between religion and science might take place.” Nearly 425 congregations in the U.S. and ten other countries have indicated they will participate in Evolution Weekend 2012 on February 10–12.

The project recently created a database of 1,000 scientists interested in working with clergy members to answer questions about all aspects of evolution. —Bob Allen, ABP

Pope's newest cardinals mostly European, insiders

For Americans who take note of the pomp and circumstance—and politics—at the Vatican, the big news in January was that Pope Benedict XVI had included New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan and former Baltimore Archbishop Edwin O'Brien among the 22 churchmen that he will install as cardinals at a mass at St. Peter's.

The elevation of Dolan, 61, is not unexpected. His predecessor, retired Cardinal Edward Egan, will lose his vote in a papal conclave when he turns 80 in April. Popes have traditionally wanted to ensure that New York is represented in the College of Cardinals for any future papal election.

But the larger story of the January 6 appointments—and an indication of how the next conclave may play out—is that the German pope continued his pattern of stacking the College of Cardinals with Europeans (mainly Italians) and with leaders of the Roman curia, the papal bureaucracy whose officials are often considered more conservative than prelates in dioceses around the world.

This trend goes against the push by Benedict's predecessors, notably the late John Paul II, to "internationalize" the College of Cardinals and make it more representative of the global church. And it runs counter to the inexorable demographics of the church, which shows the number of Catholics growing in places like Africa, Asia and Latin America, even as the faith barely treads water in North America and declines in Europe.

"This suggests an upside-down church," Robert Mickens, Vatican correspondent for the *Tablet*, a Catholic weekly in London, said of the pope's appointments. "It doesn't reflect where the church is going."

The numbers tell the story. Since Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope in April 2005, his choices in three batches of new cardinals have favored Europeans and those who work with

him in Rome over bishops from other countries.

Eighteen of the 22 cardinals in this latest round of appointments are under the age of 80 and thus eligible to vote in a conclave. (The red hats given to the four octogenarians are the church equivalent of lifetime achievement awards.) Of those 18 new electors, who will be formally installed on February 18, seven are Italians, five others are also from Europe and a total of ten are Vatican officials.

Just three of the new cardinals—from Brazil, Hong Kong and India—are from outside the West, and in the biggest surprise, none are from Africa, where the church is experiencing its greatest growth, followed by Asia. Half of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics live in the Americas.

That means that Italians will form the largest national bloc and account for one-quarter of the 126 cardinal-electors (several will "age out" this year), up from 16.5 percent in 2005. In addition, 35 percent of the cardinal-electors will come from the Roman curia—up from less than a quarter when Benedict was elected in 2005.

John Paul II, who was Polish and the first non-Italian pontiff in 450 years when he was elected in 1978, deliberately sought to internationalize the College of Cardinals and the Roman curia, though he also brought in a number of fellow Poles to help run his administration.

Why has Benedict largely reversed that trend? Vatican-watcher John Allen of the *National Catholic Reporter* noted that before he was elected pope, Ratzinger spent nearly 25 years working in Rome, and his appointments are "perhaps a product of his comfort level with Italian ecclesial culture."

The other major factor is that Benedict is at heart an Old World, old-fashioned Bavarian Catholic, and both he and the cardinals who elected him believe that Europe remains the birthplace of Catholic culture. In that view, Benedict represents the best—and perhaps last—chance to restore that culture and use it to evangelize the rest of the world.

But in light of this latest round of

cardinal appointments, and given growing concerns about Benedict's health—he turns 85 in April—this set of electors may well be the men who eventually choose Benedict's successor. Their numbers suggest they may be just as likely to look to Europe once again rather than to the future church in the Global South. —David Gibson, RNS

Controversial statue gets a makeover

Just eight months after being unveiled, a controversial statue of Pope John Paul II in Rome is receiving a major makeover. The 16-foot statue, which stands just outside the city's main railway station, since last May has been met by harsh criticism from locals and art experts alike.

The Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, criticized it for bearing "little resemblance" to the image of the late pope and described the head as "excessively spherical." Federico Mollicone, president of Rome's city council culture commission, called the statue "a permanent and sacrilegious mud stain" on the memory of John Paul II.

More than eight out of ten people who responded to a poll by the newspaper *Il Messaggero* said they didn't like the statue, and Rome Mayor Gianni Alemanno was forced by the criticism to form a commission of experts to evaluate its fate.

Now, scaffolding surrounds the statue, and in the coming weeks it will get a new head, the pope's cape will be modified and the sculpture will be placed on a higher pedestal. Its outer layer of paint will be restored because rain and smog turned the bronze green, and new lighting will be set up around it.

Sculptor Oliviero Rainaldi responded to criticism last May by saying the foundry didn't adequately execute his design. The statue is hollow inside, leading many to compare it to "a sentry box." Rainaldi said the design was meant to showcase the late pope's desire to welcome humanity. —RNS

In academia, comments about Islam remain risky

A recent spate of campus controversies involving professors who made provocative statements about Muslims shows one of two things: a decreasing tolerance for inflammatory speech, or how easy it is for academics to get into trouble. Or perhaps a little bit of both.

The incidents have forced university leaders into the uncomfortable role of deciding the line between protecting free speech and confronting bigotry. Caught in the middle are professors who say their hostility or sympathy toward Islam often results in intimidation or silence.

In December, Harvard faculty canceled two summer courses taught by Subramanian Swamy, an Indian political leader, over his newspaper column titled “How to Wipe Out Islamic Terror” last July that advocated demolishing some 300 Indian mosques and requiring Indian Muslims to prove Hindu ancestry to be allowed to vote.

The article sparked student protests, but though a Harvard spokeswoman called his remarks “distressing,” the school took no formal action.

However, when Harvard professors met on December 6 to approve the 2012 summer course catalogue, comparative religions professor Diana Eck moved to strike Swamy’s classes. Faculty approved the proposal, effectively taking away Swamy’s summer job.

Swamy, who in interviews denied that his comments were hateful, has supporters, including free speech advocates who argue that no matter how repugnant his views may be, he’s entitled to them, especially at a university where free speech is essential.

Eck insists that she wasn’t disputing Swamy’s right to free speech, but rather whether Harvard should employ a teacher who advocates violence and bigotry.

“I don’t think it is appropriate for an employee of the university, charged with teaching our students, to openly advocate the suspension of the human rights of millions of Indian citizens,” said Eck,



CLASS DISMISSED: Faculty at Harvard University voted to cancel classes taught by Indian politician Subramanian Swamy after he penned a newspaper column that was seen as inflammatory toward Muslims.

who is an India scholar and director of Harvard’s Pluralism Project.

Mujeeb Khan, a doctoral candidate at the University of California, Berkeley, who has written about anti-Muslim hate speech in academia, agreed. “You have a right to say bigoted things, but you don’t have a right to expect people to employ you,” Khan said.

The Washington-based American Association of University Professors argues in its statement on freedom of expression that no idea or statement can be deemed so hateful as to warrant banning. “An institution of higher learning fails to fulfill its mission if it asserts the power to proscribe ideas—and racial or ethnic slurs, sexist epithets, or homophobic insults almost always express ideas, however repugnant,” the 1994 statement says.

The AAUP is opposed to university administrators punishing professors, but it does condone professors taking action against peers, as the Harvard faculty did with Swamy.

The Harvard controversy follows a similar one in November at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth, Texas, where adjunct professor Paul Derengowski was forced to resign from his world religions class because his Christian Apologetics Project website lists Islam as a cult. Two Muslim students

complained that he was biased against Islam.

Also in November, students at Purdue University–Calumet in Hammond, Indiana, launched protests demanding that the school fire political science professor Maurice Eisenstein, who was accused of writing hateful comments about Muslims on his Facebook page.

Critics, like Campus Watch in Philadelphia, which monitors university curriculums, assert that academia has a liberal bias that is both pro-Muslim and anti-Christian and anti-Jewish. “The Middle East studies professorate is almost monolithically leftist due to a systematic exclusion of those with conservative or even moderately liberal views,” the group says on its website.

In a post-9/11 era, few inflammatory comments go unnoticed. But some say the problem of anti-Muslim bias has been particularly pronounced at Harvard. In 2010, Harvard established a \$650,000 research fund named for Martin Peretz, the longtime editor of the *New Republic*, even after he wrote in a blog that “Muslim life is cheap.”

At the time, the university said “it is central to the mission of a university to protect and affirm free speech, including the rights of Dr. Peretz, as well as those who disagree with him, to express their views.”

Khan didn’t think Peretz’s comments were inflammatory enough to merit punishment, but he didn’t think they deserved accolades either. “There is a problem at Harvard,” Khan said. “Harvard has been too indulgent of this kind of anti-Muslim bigotry and hate speech, which I don’t think they would have tolerated had it been directed at any other group.”

Akbar Ahmed, an Islamic studies professor at American University, and Lawrence Rosen, an anthropologist at Princeton, argued last year that universities have an “obligation” to counter anti-Muslim sentiment.

“Not since the great era of civil-rights awareness in the 1960s,” they wrote in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “has there been such a compelling need for involvement by the academic community on behalf of a minority population.” —Omar Sacirbey, RNS

Rome opens U.S. Catholic home for ex-Episcopalians

American Episcopalians upset with their denomination's acceptance of gay and female clergy can now convert to the Roman Catholic Church while keeping many cherished traditions in a special new U.S. diocese that was established on New Year's Day by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Houston-based diocese, called the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, will allow a special Anglican-style Catholic mass that can include sections from the Book of Common Prayer and other Anglican liturgies.

This new structure grew out of a controversial 2009 effort by Pope Benedict to convince conservative Anglicans to align with Rome under an exemption that allows Anglican priests, laity and even entire congregations to convert while keeping their prized music and prayers.

Bishops who convert under the rite will be allowed to function as Catholic priests but not as bishops. Married Anglican male priests will be able to remain married and serve as Catholic priests, though unmarried priests who join will not be able to marry later without renouncing their priesthood.

The American ordinariate is only the second such jurisdiction established since Benedict launched the process; the first was set up a year ago in England, the birthplace of Anglicanism, and others are being considered for Canada and Australia.

It is still unclear how much of a draw the new jurisdiction will be. So far, some 100 former Episcopal priests have applied to become Catholic priests in the U.S. ordinariate, and about 1,400 individuals—as well as six small congregations—have sought to join the Catholic Church under the new provision.

After a year's time, the ordinariate in England and Wales still counts only 1,000 formerly Anglican laypeople and 60 former Anglican priests as members.

Some Episcopalians in the U.S., like some Anglicans in other countries, have opted to affiliate with conservative Anglican bodies or breakaway traditionalist groups rather than become Catholics.

The U.S. ordinariate will be led by Jeffrey N. Steenson, a former Episcopal bishop of New Mexico and father of three who became a Catholic in 2007 and was ordained a Catholic priest in 2009.

In a statement on January 2, Steenson was enthusiastic about the new rite. However, he also cautioned that Episcopalians who join will face “a steep learning curve” in trying to integrate under such a novel arrangement.

“Pray that we may strive to learn the faith, laws, and culture of the Catholic Church with humility and good cheer,” Steenson said. “But pray too that we do not forget who we are and where we have come from, for we have been formed in the beautiful and noble Anglican tradition.” —David Gibson, RNS

Appeals court turns down Oklahoma Shari'a ban

OKLAHOMA'S referendum barring judges from considering Islamic law is unconstitutional, the Tenth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled, upholding a lower court ruling that had blocked the measure. The appeals court ruling could affect more than 20 other states where laws against Shari'a are contemplated.

In a 37-page ruling on January 10, the Tenth Circuit's three-judge panel dismissed assertions by lawyers for Oklahoma that the law did not discriminate against Muslims. “That argument conflicts with the amendment's plain language, which mentions Shari'a law in two places,” wrote Judge Scott Matheson.

The Denver-based judges said that while courts should be wary of meddling in voter referendums, minorities' constitutional rights must be protected. Some 70 percent of Oklahoma voters approved the referendum in November 2010.

Muneer Awad, head of the Oklahoma chapter of the Council of American-Islamic Relations, sued to block the measure, saying it discriminates against Islam and violates church-state separation.

“This is an important reminder that the Constitution is the last line of defense against a rising tide of anti-Muslim bigotry in our society,” Awad said in a statement, according to the *Denver Post*.

Last year, a U.S. District Court judge in Oklahoma City also found the ban unconstitutional and issued a temporary injunction preventing it from taking effect. The case now returns to the district court in Oklahoma, which is expected to issue a permanent injunction against the law.

If Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt decides to appeal that case, it would return to the appeals court—and could eventually be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. —RNS

Virginia judge rules against breakaway Episcopal parishes

Seven congregations that broke with the Episcopal Church in 2006 over its liberal policies on homosexuality are not entitled to keep parish property estimated to be worth millions, a Virginia judge has ruled.

The ruling by Fairfax County Judge Randy Bellows in January reverses a decision he made in 2008—and hands a major victory to the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Virginia, which had fought hard to keep the property.

One of the churches, the Falls Church, traces its roots to colonial times and has counted among its members a former CIA director, a onetime White House speechwriter, members of Congress and numerous media mavens. Several of the congregations meet on valuable real estate in Washington's booming Northern Virginia suburbs.

Bellows said the property must now be returned to the Episcopal Church and

the Diocese of Virginia. In a statement, the congregations said they will consider appealing the decision.

Since leaving the Episcopal Church, the seven congregations have joined the Anglican Church in North America, which is seeking recognition as an official branch of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

In 2010, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled that Bellows misapplied a state law that allows some breakaway congregations to keep parish property and sent the case back for his reconsideration.

On January 10, Bellows wrote that the parishes had the right to break from the Episcopal Church but “had no right to take these seven Episcopal churches with them.”

Under Episcopal Church law, property owned by any member congregation, parish or mission is held in trust for the national denomination. Citing that provision, secular courts have generally ruled against the dozens of breakaway parishes that have split from the Episcopal Church since it elected an openly gay bishop in 2003. —Daniel Burke, RNS

Catholic bishop admits fathering teens, resigns

A Catholic bishop in the Los Angeles archdiocese has resigned after admitting that he is the father of two children, both now teenagers. The Vatican announced that Pope Benedict XVI had accepted the resignation of Auxiliary Bishop Gabino Zavala, 60, who was born in Mexico and grew up in Los Angeles.

Ordained in 1977 and named a bishop in 1994, Zavala had a reputation for fighting on behalf of immigrants and the poor and against the death penalty. Most recently, Zavala had overseen the bishops' communications office and media outreach.

Observers say his scandal could hamper the bishops' high-profile public campaign against gay marriage and could affect efforts by the American bishops to develop Hispanic leaders to minister to the burgeoning U.S. population of Hispanic Catholics.

Hispanics account for most of the

growth in U.S. Catholicism, and within a generation they are projected to be the majority ethnic group in the church. But out of nearly 300 active bishops in the United States, just 26 are Hispanic. There are 13 retired Latino bishops, including Zavala.

Neither the Vatican nor the archdiocese provided an explanation for Zavala's resignation, saying only that it had been accepted under the canon law requiring a bishop to step down “because of illness or some other grave reason.”

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez said in a letter released January 4 that Zavala told him in early December that he is the father of two teenage children, both still minors, who live with their mother in another state.

Assuming that the two children are 17 or younger, they would have been born after Zavala had been appointed a bishop. Calling the news “sad and difficult,” Gomez said that Zavala has been out of ministry and “living privately.” He said the archdiocese “has reached out to the mother and children to provide spiritual care as well as funding to assist the children with college costs.”

Gomez did not identify the family out of respect for their privacy. —RNS

Japanese film critical of idolatry, militarism

A new Japanese film highlights the struggles of a Christian music teacher and two former teachers to defend their beliefs, including their disagreement with the compulsory singing of the national anthem in schools.

Scheduled to be shown in Tokyo and Osaka on separate dates in January and available as a Japanese-language DVD, the film *True to Myself* was shown with English subtitles at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival in Japan last October. The director, Toshikuni Doi, hopes to make it available as an English-language DVD and a YouTube video by March.

“[The film] is a record of the ‘way of life’ of the three teachers who struggle in dignity to resist Japanese society leaning to the right and returning to the prewar period,” said Doi.

Miwako Sato, a music teacher and a member of the United Church of Christ in Japan, said she wants to raise awareness about the enforced use in Japanese schools since 1999 of the

Two churches join Alliance of Baptists

TWO CHURCHES disciplined by Baptist bodies for affirming gays have joined the Alliance of Baptists, a theologically progressive organization formed by churches and individuals separating from the Southern Baptist Convention in 1987.

The alliance's e-mail newsletter announced January 10 the addition of Journey Fellowship in Owensboro, Kentucky, and Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas. The new congregations increase the total of alliance churches to 124.

Journey Fellowship was kicked out of Daviess-McLean Baptist Association in August for allowing a chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays to meet monthly on church property. Association leaders said that by accommodating the group,

the church plant formerly known as Seven Hills Baptist Church implied endorsement of views contrary to what Southern Baptists believe.

In the other case, the Baptist General Convention of Texas voted in May 2010 to no longer accept funds from Royal Lane Baptist Church after a *Dallas Morning News* article described the congregation as “coming out of the closet” and appointing deacons who were openly gay.

“On behalf of our congregation at Royal Lane, let me say how pleased we are to be officially affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists,” wrote Pastor David Matthews. “Some of us have admired the work of the alliance since its inception, and we already feel at home with you.” —ABP

national flag and the anthem, known as “Kimigayo.”

Critics say it violates Japan’s postwar constitutional freedom of thought, conscience, religion and education, because the anthem and flag were symbols of the quasi-religious militarism under the emperor. Sato said in an interview that she sees the country’s emperor system as “a pyramid of status discrimination” and idolatry worship.

Sato is opposed to the emperor system mostly because her late father, who was a prisoner of war before he devoted himself as a pastor to the cause of peace, told her that “unless you resist the emperor system, you will be judged not only by the country of Japan but also by God.”

Sato said she hopes the film will be seen by other Christian communities in the world. “Our efforts within Japan have reached their limits. I want external pressures from abroad,” she told journalists at a December news conference.

One of the former teachers, Nobuo Dohi, sued the Tokyo education board in 2009 for dismissing him from his position as a high school headmaster for his protest against the board’s regulation of speech at teachers’ meetings at the school.

The other former teacher, Kimiko Nezu, sued the Tokyo education board, personnel board and the governor in 2007 for

suspending her for six months after she refused to stand when the anthem was sung at her school’s admission and graduation ceremonies. —Hisashi Yukimoto, ENInews

It’s 2012, another year for ‘doomsday’ chatter

On December 21, 2012, the Mayan calendar reaches the end of its 5,126-year epoch. That’s a cause for consternation among some end-time adherents—and for amusement among some descendants of the Maya.

Fresh from having survived one end-of-the-world prediction—a two-stage affair covering 2011’s drop-dead dates of May 21 and October 21—we now plunge into the countdown for End-Time 2012.

Should you be inclined, you can use your smartphone to check how many days are remaining before a date that was carved into rock by a pre-Columbian civilization. You can blame—or credit—the Maya for the commotion. Or, more likely, their New Age adherents.

The ancient Mayan calendar does technically end at 12/21/2012. But Mayan experts say it’s simply a case of one long Mayan epoch—of 5,126 years—coming to an end, in much the same way the 1900s came to an end.

“I don’t think the Mayan put a picture of Porky Pig at the end of their calendar and said, ‘That’s all, folks,’” said Jefferson Harman, a Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, “intuitive,” or dream interpreter, who runs a workshop called “Beyond 2012.”

All this calendar talk is news to Firmo Choc, a 39-year-old Mayan farmer who lives in a rural village in Belize. Only recently did he hear of the New Age crowd’s fuss over his culture’s ancient calendar, when his North American employer told him about it. Not only was Choc taken aback to hear the end of the world prediction attributed to his people, he was surprised that outsiders are even familiar with the calendar. He, his family, his friends and neighbors all use the standard Western calendar.

“The Mayan who surround me have no idea that some calendar their ancestors created indicates that a great change

is to occur in 2012. They are just hoping their corn and cacao crops will be plentiful so their family won’t starve in 2012,” said Choc’s employer, Anne-Michelle Marsden, a Rutgers University professor who lives in Belize.

About a decade ago, Marsden spent her sabbatical year in Belize producing a documentary called *The Living Maya*. Choc travels to the coast by bus along unpaved roads twice a week to work as her groundskeeper. He has eight children; the oldest boy had to stop his schooling to help on the family cacao farm. He’s Catholic but participates in the Mayan Deer Dance ceremony when it is celebrated in his village.

Choc is not concerned about the world ending any time soon. He’s mostly concerned about supporting his family. School fees are very expensive, wages are low and job prospects for nonfarmers poor.

Mayans in parts of Guatemala and Mexico still refer to the ancient Mayan calendar, consulting it in part because of the belief that certain glyphs, or pictures, that accompany the calendar’s days influence events in much the way astrological signs are said to hold sway.

The Mayan calendar is a veritable cottage industry for archaeologists, anthropologists and numerologists, who have been throwing out theories of interpretation since the turn of the previous century. With very little in the way of written documentation from the calendar’s originators, the theories are hard to prove—or disprove.

The end-time proposition has been floating around for 30 years or so, put forth by New Age spiritualists like the late Terence McKenna, who claimed that it signaled the start of a period of broader human consciousness.

Denise Saracco, a self-described shaman and massage therapist who runs a workshop called “Demystifying the Mayan Calendar” at the Peaceful Paths store in Butler, New Jersey, learned about the calendar as part of her two-year shaman apprenticeship. Saracco believes that 2012 is a key date—although she stops short of predicting what will happen. “Is it the end of the world? No,” she said. “It’s the end of the world as we know it.” —Kathleen O’Brien, RNS



CLOSE TO SAINTHOOD: Mother Marianne Cope, a German-born Catholic nun (above) who worked with lepers in Hawaii, is on the verge of becoming a new American saint after Pope Benedict XVI certified health-recovery miracles due to her intercession by prayer. Canonization still requires a papal bull, which is likely to come this year.

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, February 12

2 Kings 5: 1–14; Mark 1:40–45

EVER SINCE I was a kid, I've been intrigued by gestalt pictures. These intriguing pictures contain two images, but the viewer can see only one of them at a time; as one comes to the foreground, the other recedes into the background. In one famous picture I can see either two faces or a candlestick. In another one, I can see either a young woman or an older one. What fascinates me is that it's an either/or experience.

Something similar is going on in today's first and third readings. On the surface it appears that a healing event ties them together, but beneath the healing is the perception of each of the characters as they register what is foreground and what is background.

In the foreground for Naaman of Aram is a particular notion of power. We see this in two places. First, he expects that Elisha, the mighty prophet of Israel, will attend to him personally. After all, he has come with letters of commendation from the king of Aram, letters that twist the stomach of Israel's king into icy knots. Yet Elisha is unimpressed. Rather than going to Naaman himself, he sends a servant to deliver his message. Second, Naaman assumes that his healing should be dramatic, a show of great power. He is therefore not only disappointed but downright offended when Elisha tells him to take a dip in the river Jordan. His vision obscured by his expectations, Naaman cannot see God at work right in front of him.

In fact, God is at work in many small and wondrous ways: in the presence of a captive Israeli girl who has the gumption to confess the power of her God, in the willingness of Naaman's wife to take counsel from her Israeli maid, in the boldness of servants who confront their master with reason rather than curry his favor by indulging his outrage. Interestingly, God is also at work in large matters as well. According to the author of this passage, the Lord gave victory to Aram through Naaman. Seeing his own power in the foreground, however, Naaman is unable to detect the presence of God in things both small and large. Only when he drops his preconceptions and heeds the prophet's command does the picture invert, bringing the background to the fore: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

In the Gospel story the leper is not blighted by misconceptions of power. Whatever his life may have been—whatever had previously been in the foreground of his world—has receded. He is an outcast, unclean and unwanted, defined and dominated by his condition. When he sees Jesus, he recognizes

him intuitively not in spite of, but because of, his great need. He comes to Jesus on bended knee, begging for mercy: "If you choose, you can make me clean."

Jesus responds. How could he not, we may wonder; after all, this is what Jesus does in Mark, casting out whatever stands against God's kingdom and releasing health and healing in its stead. But at this moment in the story Mark offers a rare glimpse into Jesus' emotional state. Jesus doesn't simply cure: moved by pity, he stretches out his hand, touches the one thought to be untouchable and affirms the insight of the man: "I do choose!"

With his brokenness and need in the foreground, this man recognizes Jesus as the one who embodies God's coming kingdom. This emphasis on perception might also explain the next twist in the story. Jesus orders him to be silent. Why? Is it because he knows that the crowds, like Naaman, have confused foreground and background? They will come seeking a miracle worker with the power and authority to grant them what they wish. Jesus, as Mark makes abundantly clear, is not this kind of Messiah. His judgment is expressed as mercy, his power revealed in weakness and his glory apparent only in suffering. Because he is not the warrior king many people expected, those who cherish power and might want nothing to do with him.

It's hard to blame them. Don't we too seek, if not power, at least security, comfort and assurance? Jesus offers mercy, weakness and suffering—things we try to keep in the background. Yet these things are part and parcel of our lives. Although he had power, authority and prestige, Naaman struggled with an incurable illness. We don't know what kind of life the leper led before he was a leper, but he too lost all. Are we any different? Jobs are lost. Relationships end. Success disappoints. Friends come and go. There is an end to all things. God comes in weakness because this is where we vulnerable, fragile children of dust live, and because God doesn't want simply to make our lives a little better but actually intends to redeem them.

Like both Naaman and the leper, we can undergo this change in perspective, release our claim to power or entitlement and perceive God at work in the broken places of our lives. Then everything changes. We recognize that we are loved not because we have earned the right to be loved but because God is love. We perceive that we are forgiven and accepted not because we have paid our debt or merited it but because God is forgiveness and mercy. No wonder Naaman declares his devotion. No wonder the leper runs to tell others what he has experienced. When background becomes foreground and life overflows with grace and mercy, you just can't keep silent.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, February 19

2 Kings 2:1–12; Mark 9:2–9

IN MY CHILDHOOD one of the lessons I had to learn the hard way—and repeatedly—is that coming down is almost always more difficult than going up. Whether I was scaling a tall tree, climbing rocks or racing to the top of a ladder, the descent seemed both harder and more nerve-wracking than the ascent. Perhaps that's why I'm drawn to the last verses in both the first and third readings for this day: each talks about life on the downslope.

The lection from 2 Kings describes the surprisingly poignant scene of Elijah's departure. We tend to think of prophets as loners set apart to receive and convey visions from the Lord. Yet this scene names several companies of prophets that surround Elisha, and it describes his close relationship with Elijah and his sadness at their impending separation. This is why Elisha asks for a "double share" of Elijah's spirit—not because he wants to be "twice the prophet" that his mentor was, but because he wants to be bound to Elijah as his true heir and spiritual son (Deut. 21:17).

In the closing verse of the scene, Elisha has received the double share of Elijah's spirit. But all he can do is rend his clothes in grief; he has gone up with Elijah to the place of his ascension, but he must return alone.

In Mark we read about a physical descent. Jesus has led Peter, James and John up a high mountain. After seeing Jesus transfigured before their eyes and witnessing his communion with legendary figures of Israel's past, the disciples must descend into the valley. On the way down Jesus orders them not to tell others what they have seen until after he has been raised from the dead. (Only days earlier he had told them that he would be crucified and raised from death.) If the disciples hoped that Jesus didn't know what he was saying—Peter's response was to rebuke Jesus—these hopes are now gone.

Coming back down is almost always harder than going up. This isn't news for most of us. We are accustomed to the let-down that follows a holiday or a vacation. Oddly, sometimes it is the climb to the heights with all that we saw there that makes the return to normalcy harder. This is true in the life of faith as well. As W. H. Auden writes in "For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio": "To those who have seen / The Child, however dimly, however incredulously, / The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all."

In the middle of February, Christmas is a distant memory. The Super Bowl is over, and no doubt the groundhog has seen his shadow. The economy is still sluggish, jobless rates are too high and an election cycle is in full swing. We're in "the meantime," the most trying time of all.

Yet this reading offers three insights that may speak to those of us on the descent. First, we are needed "down here." Most of life is lived in the valleys and on the slopes, not on the heights. Mark's Gospel has sometimes been characterized as preaching a message of "glory through suffering." A better designation might be "glory through service," because Jesus regularly invites his disciples to follow his example of meeting the needs of those whom society has ignored. We are not called to seek out suffering for suffering's sake, but our service to those whom society disdains may lead us to suffering.

Second, God meets us in the valley and is at work there. We humans imagine that we must retreat from society in order to meet God, maintain purity in order to stand in God's presence, or achieve some measure of moral or religious holiness in order to merit God's attention. Yet in Jesus

Our service to those whom society disdains may lead us to suffering.

the flow of the action is reversed. Rather than retreat from society's needs he embraces them. Rather than avoid those who are unclean or diseased he cures them. Rather than condemn those who are sinful he forgives them. When we meet others in solidarity at the places of disjuncture and fracture in their lives and our own, we find God waiting for us.

Third, moments atop the mountain—both physical and emotional—can give us insight into our lives and purpose, courage to continue on the way and renewed hope of what is to come. We remember Martin Luther King Jr.'s prophetic and telling words just before his death: he was no longer afraid because he'd been to the mountain and seen what was in store for him. We must celebrate even a glimpse of such vistas from atop the mountain; they help us as we make our way down to encounters with both God and neighbor.

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Retrieving ancient sources to challenge racism

The new black theology

by Jonathan Tran

A COUPLE YEARS AGO, when the CENTURY asked some leading theologians to name five “essential theology books of the past 25 years,” J. Kameron Carter’s *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford University Press, 2008) was one of the few books mentioned more than once and the only one that was published in the past five years. Last year, the American Academy of Religion gave its Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion to Willie J. Jennings’s *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2010). These two influential works, together with *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity* (Baylor University Press, 2010), by Brian Bantum (who studied at Duke with both Carter and Jennings), represent a major theological shift that will—if taken as seriously as it deserves—change the face not only of black theology but theology as a whole.

What is revolutionary about these three black theologians is that they rely heavily on dogmatic texts from the patristic period to the Reformation. Why is this novel? Because nonwhite male theologians have historically been hesitant to trust these sources—and for good reason. In the worst of times, classic theological texts have been used to oppress persons of color and women. In the best of times, the overwhelming attention given these particular voices obscured other voices, giving the impression that the only Christians speaking and writing about God for the last 2,000 years were European men. Those who did not fit that description simply did not know how to relate to a tradition that claimed to speak for but did not reflect them.

James Cone, considered the father of contemporary black theology, expressed these frustrations four decades ago. “American theology,” he wrote, “is racist. . . . It identifies theology as dispassionate analysis of ‘the tradition,’ unrelated to the suffering of the oppressed.” The result, Cone observed, was that “an increasing number of black religionists are finding it difficult to be black and be identified with traditional theological thought forms.” Disconnecting themselves from the Anglo-European white tradition, black intellectuals looked to other sources to describe how African-American Christians talked about and related to God.

Many Western theologians in the last few decades have returned to premodern theological sources, representing an intellectual renaissance of sorts as Christians look back to classical theologians from Augustine to Maximus the Confessor to

Catherine of Siena for expressions of present-day faith. This was not entirely unexpected as Christianity tried to free itself from the hold the Enlightenment had on the church for so long.

However, what is quite surprising is that persons of color and women are increasingly finding their way to these sources. This shift in black theology’s relationship to traditional Christianity means that the rest of the church can no longer

Racism is a mistake about Christ, a failure to grasp the Trinity.

ignore black theology’s claims. So long as black theologians felt that they had good reason to pursue nontraditional and extra-Christian sources in such secular social theory as anthropology, cultural studies, sociology and political science, white theologians could keep black theology at arm’s length. When black theology championed the black church as the location of God’s preference and accused white Christianity of heresy, white theologians only saw secularism run amok. Or at least they could claim as much, allowing them to dismiss much black theology outright no matter how scripturally anchored it was.

Black theology’s return to pre-Enlightenment sources is also surprising in that the Enlightenment has often been credited with overcoming oppression. In a fascinating reversal, Jennings, Carter and Bantum turn the Enlightenment’s claim of liberation on its head, locating in that movement a basis of oppression and looking instead to ancient and medieval Christian theology to free us from contemporary racism.

In a claim characteristic of this new theology, Carter takes social theory’s emphasis on difference and recasts it theologically: “Difference theologically understood arises from the positivity of the hypostatic distinctions [in the Trinity] within which the possibility and, according to the will of God, the

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actuality or concreteness of creation is located. It is precisely this understanding of difference—difference as witness to and participation within the Trinitarian hypostatic distinctions—that modern logics of race foreclose.”

Carter’s thesis is that modern racism is similar in form to the various heretical “isms” that emerged during the early church’s controversies over its relationship to Israel (supersessionism and Marcionism) and over the relation of Christ’s humanity and divinity (gnosticism, adoptionism, Nestorianism). Therefore a theological response to racism entails a more faithful articulation of the nature of the Trinity.

Key to both Carter’s and Jennings’s work is their deep concern with the Jewish identity of Jesus. In *The Christian Imagination*, Jennings insists that only by affirming Jesus’ Jewish body can one comprehend the meaning of salvation. Gentiles were baptized into Jesus’ Jewish body, which continues and fulfills (and never denies) God’s covenant with Israel. Engrafted into God’s salvation of the Jews, the gentiles were saved insofar as the Jews were saved. It was Christ’s unique human-divine personage that integrated gentiles into Israel’s covenant life with God.

Jennings and Carter both insist that bodies matter—and in a particularly Jewish-Christian way. Jewish flesh is most authentically itself when it welcomes the gentile. This hospitality enacts what Carter calls “the theodramatic constitution of existence.” In the same way that God elects and receives Israel, elected Israel receives the gentiles as an extension of God’s reception history. “Israel’s meaning and significance,” writes Carter, “arise out of its being related to the nations before whom the drama of the Jews’ election unfolds. The drama of Israel thus is not insular, for it unfolds in such a way as to enfold the nations into its drama.”

The church, insofar as it continues Israel’s salvation, seeks inclusion rather than exclusion. Israel is elected by God for the specific task of blessing the nations; to speak of Israel’s chosenness, then, is to speak of inclusion rather than exclusion—the very opposite of racism’s infatuation with purity.

For the new black theologians, the sources of racism (and the resources for its repudiation) lie in Christianity’s failure to live into its Jewishness. The problem is not simply that Jewish Christians did not easily accept gentiles into the church. Rather, the problem is that after the gentiles were accepted, the question became: What now becomes of the Jews? For Carter, when Christians get this question wrong, they get everything wrong (including what it means for creatures to have the kinds of bodies they do), producing in the process the idea that bodies can and should be thought of in terms of race.

In European Christianity, the general question about difference settled on the specific question of Jewish difference—what came to be called *der Judenfrage* (the Jewish question). Attempting to espouse a universal conception of humanness independent of and over against the Jewish covenant of promise, European Christians crafted a rival discourse to help explain the Jews (and the non-European others whom the Jews exemplified): race. Speech about “race” helped construe the



Jews as a people inordinately attached to their peculiar practices and outdated laws. The Jews become “the other” by which European Christianity defined itself. European Christians, in this view, are the universal race because they, unlike the Jews, are able to shed their religious particularity just the way Jesus superseded the particularity of Jewish law. Or so the story went.

When the Enlightenment sought to find the standpoint of universal reason, it could only look down upon people (Jewish and some other ethnic groups)

who—it was thought—could not so easily transcend their bodies. In a vicious but unquestioned bit of circular reasoning, it was decided that only Europeans could achieve this universality of reason. According to Carter, this trumped-up notion of reason resulted in the universality of whiteness according to which non-Europeans comprise lesser hues of whiteness. Nonwhite people simply could not get out of their bodies in the way that white people had.

White people, according to this line of thought, “are not a race in the same way that the other human races have become races. The other races have become races in such a way as to be held hostage to their own particularity,” says Carter. “Their particularity as race groups is excessive or out of balance inasmuch as it aims at only its own particularity. Indeed, they suffer under the entropy of their own particularity; they can’t get over themselves.” What makes white people “white” is their ability to get out of their bodies, to transcend bodily entrapment by way of reason’s surpassing abilities.

“Whiteness” is not so much something as nothing—a myth-

Reviews of Brian Bantum’s *Redeeming Mulatto*
and James H. Cone’s *The Cross and the*
Lynching Tree begin on p. 38

ic conception of nonparticularity, the achievement of genuine transcendence, true reason. It is purity, existence free of the blemishes that colored all other races. Thus race became the way Westerners came to understand people's differences and where people belong in the hierarchy of existence.

The power of race lies not only in its ability to license violence perpetuated within what Jennings calls "the colonialist logics." The further tragedy is that conquered non-European peoples came to think of themselves in terms of race. Slaves came to speak the language of their masters and see themselves through European eyes. The devastating violence of colonialism and slavery resulted in people being deprived of the homes and communities that had for generations provided the narratives for understanding themselves. In the absence of these grounding narratives, they adopted the only discourse available—the discourse of race.

That we all now speak the language of race demonstrates the depth and breadth to which our imaginations have been colonized in just the way Jennings lays out. Beauty, intelligence, piety and every other mark of personhood are indexed along a spectrum of whiteness. For example, nonwhite persons who want to be seen (by themselves and others) as physically attractive have to come up with ways to look white. In the 19th and 20th centuries a veritable industry emerged to supply the cosmetic techniques (from methods for hair straightening to skin lighteners to plastic surgery) for this passage into whiteness.

Carter and Jennings undercut racism by positioning Jewish particularity as the keystone, rather than the barrier, to salvation. One way we can account for the violence of European colonization is by interpreting it as a corrupted mission to the nations that required unprecedented amounts of violence to disguise its falsehood. By embedding the salvation of the nations in the particularity of Christ's Jewish flesh, Carter anchors salvation to its christological moorings in a way that demands that the church's missionary efforts resemble Christlike self-giving.

Pietà

He roamed quarries at Carrara
caressing blocks of marble, tracing veins
like a blind man
to find the Virgin within. Here,
the limp arm hangs; here,
the bent head of the mother;
here, her murdered son.

He coaxed her from stone
chiseling in her face the memory of
Simeon's prophecy of a sword piercing her heart:
a wholly inadequate portent for this,
this hammer of death
harder than marble.

Maria Garriott

Instead of Christianity being expressed in a colonizing and slaveholding universalism, Christ is inscribed in the flesh of those whose slave narratives proclaim the good news. Rather than look for the triumph of the universal over the particular, the slave finds her particularity marked in the particularity of Christ's sufferings and resurrection, which universally gathers and heals those who suffer. This unity "reorders" humanity without overwhelming it.

By returning to the scene of racism's theological origins, the new theology outlines where things initially went wrong and charts an alternative course. A better option was there all along in the church's affirmation of Jesus' humanity (a particular, Jewish humanity) and divinity.

Debates in the early church about Jesus' identity featured two sides: one side prioritized Jesus' humanity at the cost of downplaying his divinity; the other prioritized Christ's divinity even if that meant disparaging his humanity. The church ultimately settled these matters at the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, where Christ's humanity and divinity were both affirmed within the trinitarian confession.

It is at this point that Bantum, Carter and Jennings reinvigorate the likes of Irenaeus, Athanasius and Maximus in their articulations of orthodox Christology. White supremacy (and its nonwhite versions) can be indicted as a modern perpetration of adoptionism (the early heresy that prioritized Christ's humanity over his divinity). Those who malign certain kinds of bodies (such as bodies different from one's own) or ignore bodily life altogether (as in the notion of "color blindness" popular among evangelicals) are guilty of a new strain of gnosticism (the early heresy that prioritized Christ's divinity over his humanity). The new theology finds a way forward by returning to what the church long ago affirmed: Christ's divine-human particularity and Christ's divine-human universality. The church's deep affirmation of corporality, re-instantiated in every celebration of the Eucharist, calls Christians to embrace rather than oppress the stranger.

Carter summons Maximus the Confessor from the seventh-century Eastern church to help us understand racism's victims: "In healing the human condition, Christ emptied himself (*kenosis*) to take the form of the slave, and one is led to conclude that the site of God's wealth is Jesus' poor and enslaved flesh. Having taken on the form of poverty and the form of the slave, God in Christ is the impoverished slave. As such, God enters into the hurts of those who suffer so that from inside those hurts, being fully identified with them to the point of communicating his divinity through them, he heals them. It is the poor slave, one might say, who is closest to God and so reveals God." By utilizing traditional sources like Maximus to attend to the suffering of the oppressed, the new black theology takes "the tradition" in a direction that Cone could only dream of four decades ago.

In *Redeeming Mulatto*, Bantum makes his own use of patristic formulations about Christ in order to address the promises and challenges of interracial existence. He views mixed-race persons through the lens of "the hypostatic union," the early church's term for the union of divine and human in Christ.

Amid the pains and confusions of what was once branded “mongrelization” stands the fullness of Christ’s joining of humanity and divinity. For Bantum, the mulatto “participates in” Christ’s fullness; biracial individuals “perform” the drama of redemption as scripted in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. In Christ’s person, one confronts not only the mystery of divinity but the “impossible possibility” of humanity joined to divinity. Jesus “was mulatto not solely because he was a ‘mixture,’ but because his very body confounds the boundaries of purity/impurity and humanity/divinity that seemed necessary for us to imagine who we thought we should be.”

Baptized into this body, the church in all of its differences offers the world a genuinely reconciled body of diverse persons, in contrast to political orders that exclude (the opposite of baptism) in the name of race, gender, nation, class, ethnicity and so on. According to Bantum, the church speaks the language attuned to this politics of difference: prayer. This is good news for each one of us who is “passing” through America’s complex racial heritage, and it is an indictment of those seeking racial purity and the banishment of racial difference.

When Bantum uses creedal affirmations of Christ’s humanity and divinity to uplift historically shamed biracial persons, he, like Carter and Jennings, speaks in terms that cannot be easily dismissed by white theologians. If Bantum is right about Christology, any Christian (white or otherwise) who affirms the Chalcedonian formula about Christ’s two natures must rethink mulatto life. And if he refuses such rethinking, he cannot blame Bantum’s alleged lack of orthodoxy.

In other words, black theology is reclaiming the theological tradition as its own and, under the banner of orthodoxy, taking on all comers. By rethinking the Enlightenment’s promises of enlightenment and rearticulating racial existence in the language of the church’s most sacred doctrines, black theology is now (or once again) making a case that cannot be denied. The debate is no longer fixed on racial identity politics (a quagmire from which none can escape); rather, it takes place on the level playing field of orthodoxy.

The new theology reminds us that it was a mistake to call black theology “black theology” in the first place. Consistency at least would have required that European theology equally bear the burden of qualifications (“colonizing theology”). To be sure, patronizing name-calling allowed black theology

to develop its own voice in its own time, just as the segregated black church developed its own styles, saints and stories. But because the margins were managed by white theologians, those voices were heard by whites, and when heard they were regarded as less than equal and so were not allowed to challenge white hegemony and help white theology be anything other than white theology.

Accordingly, the new black theology is best described as the new theology, no (dis)qualifying adjective necessary. In it we see Christian theology at long last incarnating the material conditions whereby the good news becomes good news. **CC**



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A taste for Dante

by Peter S. Hawkins

T. S. ELIOT FAMOUSLY said that the world of literature is handily divided between Dante and Shakespeare: the one is deep, the other broad. Perhaps. What is certain is that we never seem to tire of the two. Both writers are perennially “in production,” with new takes on 400-year-old plays on stage and screen and well over 20 fresh English translations of the entire *Commedia* published since World War II.

Enduring fame, however, is a mixed blessing, for a writer’s outrageous good fortune inevitably has its slings and arrows. For instance, Roland Emmerich’s 2011 film *Anonymous* has tried once again to take away the Bard’s plays and confer them instead on the Earl of Oxford. An analogous hijacking befell Dante the year before: the poet’s feckless pilgrim protagonist, scared of his own shadow and always in need of rescue, becomes in the 2010 computer game *Dante’s Inferno* a sword-wielding action hero, and the magisterial Beatrice—his rescuer in the *Commedia*—a décolleté damsel in distress.

Despite Dante’s cultural currency, both high and low—what town of any size lacks a nightclub called “Dante’s Inferno”?—the poet is a harder sell than the playwright. Instead of five acts and one or two intermissions, we get over 14,000 lines of poetry with a density of reference that makes keeping track of the Houses of York and Lancaster, or who’s who on the shores of Bohemia, seem easy. To be sure, contemporary editions of Shakespeare’s plays have their notes and glosses, to make sure we understand the Elizabethan language and at least some of the allusions; but that is nothing like the compendium of information that weighs down most of the standard annotated editions of Dante, replete with diagrams and charts, timelines, the intricacies of politics, geography, the stars, Latin and vernacular literatures and, most daunting of all, theology. Unlike the apparatus-free Gideon Bible, which presents the extraordinarily complicated Good Book unadorned, the *Commedia* seems unable to stand on its own.

This is where A. N. Wilson enters the picture with a literary biography that aims to bridge the gap between the *Commedia* and the “intelligent audience” of nonspecialists who, allegedly abandoned by the professionals, are like sheep without a shepherd. (The several such books already aimed at the “general educated reader” have failed to fit the author’s bill.)

To bring the reluctant newcomer onboard, Wilson begins by telling his personal story of discovery. A youthful Christian devotee of the poem, a self-described “amateur Dantean,” and then, briefly, an Oxford lecturer in medieval literature, he fell

early under the spell of Charles Williams (as had Eliot, W. H. Auden and Dorothy Sayers before him).

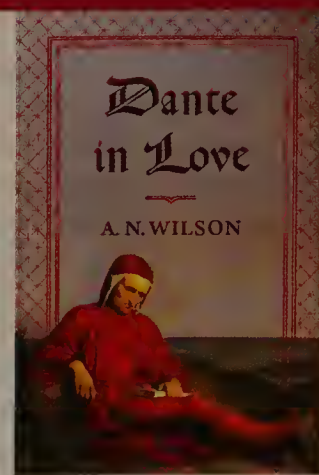
Williams’s *Figure of Beatrice* offered a deeply theological reading of the poem. But rather than excavating a medieval (and therefore “dated”) work for its debts to Bonaventure or Aquinas, Williams treated it as a way to God that could be undertaken here and now—almost as a work of practical theology. In a book without footnotes or bibliography but only readings of the text, Williams trusted Dante’s narrative to be essentially all that the reader needed. By taking that story to heart—by understanding Beatrice as the key that opens the door to the universe—a reader could learn not only about the divine love that moves the sun and the other stars, but also about the ultimate trajectory of the love we have for one another—and especially for those with whom we are “in love.”

Was all of this too rich for Wilson’s blood? He doesn’t say. He only reveals that after a time, Williams’s theology of romantic love became an “all-pervading influence” he needed to escape. It turned out to be an escape not only from Williams the man (spoofed in Wilson’s five *Lampitt Chronicles*) but also from his Christianity.

A reluctant convert to atheism, Wilson nonetheless remained haunted by what he had left behind. In the preface to *Jesus: A Life* (1992) he tells his readers that biblical criticism, and the probability that Paul “invented” the Christian religion, finally made it impossible for him to address Jesus as if he were alive, or recite creeds affirming him as Lord and Judge of the universe. Others might reconcile their disbelief with religious practice—pretend in good faith—but not him: “I did not feel it was honest to continue to call myself a Christian.” He was, therefore, among the many who found that the Sea of Faith was at permanent ebb and themselves at a profound loss.

Wilson tells the background of this story in *God’s Funeral*

Peter S. Hawkins teaches at Yale Divinity School. His books include *Dante’s Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford University Press).



Dante in Love

By A. N. Wilson

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 400 pp., \$35.00

(1999), an exploration of God's "death" in 19th-century England, when people continued to build and attend churches but no longer believed in what they stood for. In place of a vital Christianity, what remained was "a new imaginative order of unbelief" and with it "a devastating sense of loss extending to our own times." Wilson was among the mourners.

But that was 20 years ago. The author of *Dante in Love*, who dedicates his book to the archbishop of Canterbury and his

Wilson invites the reader on an adventure that follows Dante through his life.

wife, is someone who has come back to the faith—a return announced as "Why I Believe Again" in the *New Statesman* (April 2, 2009). The news caused hubbub and derision: to the cultured despisers of religion he was a fuddy-duddy throwback who had reneged on the cold hard truth for the old lie. The new convert was himself taken aback by his spiritual about-face. As if surprised that his end should also be his beginning, Wilson found himself not only worshipping at a parish in London—and writing about what it felt like, for instance, to participate in a

Palm Sunday procession—but doing so in the same Anglo-Catholic church that Charles Williams had once called his own.

Wilson's book is by no means an update of *The Figure of Beatrice*, however. His overriding interest is neither theological nor focused on Dante's beloved, despite his title. Rather, he is interested in the poet's context: the historical, political and cultural world in which the poem was written and to which it was first addressed. Annotated editions of the *Commedia* give names and dates in footnotes, a piecemeal view. Wilson wants to give the Big Picture—to invite the reader on an adventure that follows Dante through the little we actually know of his life: the vicissitudes of his Florentine political involvements, the pain of his two-decade exile, and the preoccupations that made him (although he had neither power nor position) a 14th-century "public intellectual."

It's a fascinating story. Dante wrote in Latin about the potential of the vernacular for eloquence, about empire as a solution to city-state civil war, about philosophy as a way that men and women equipped only with Italian could gain access to a celestial Athens of the enlightened.

And then he wrote the *Commedia*, the *ultimo lavoro* that would consume his life for more than a decade and involve re-appraisal (and often revision) of almost everything he had written beforehand. It was some time after 1307 that Dante began work on what would be his taskmaster until death, a poem in which all the unfinished business of his exilic prose

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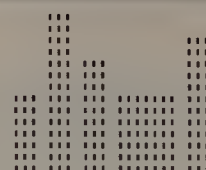
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was transfigured into a vision of the universe as God might see it. Some have seen it as an account of Dante's own midlife conversion.

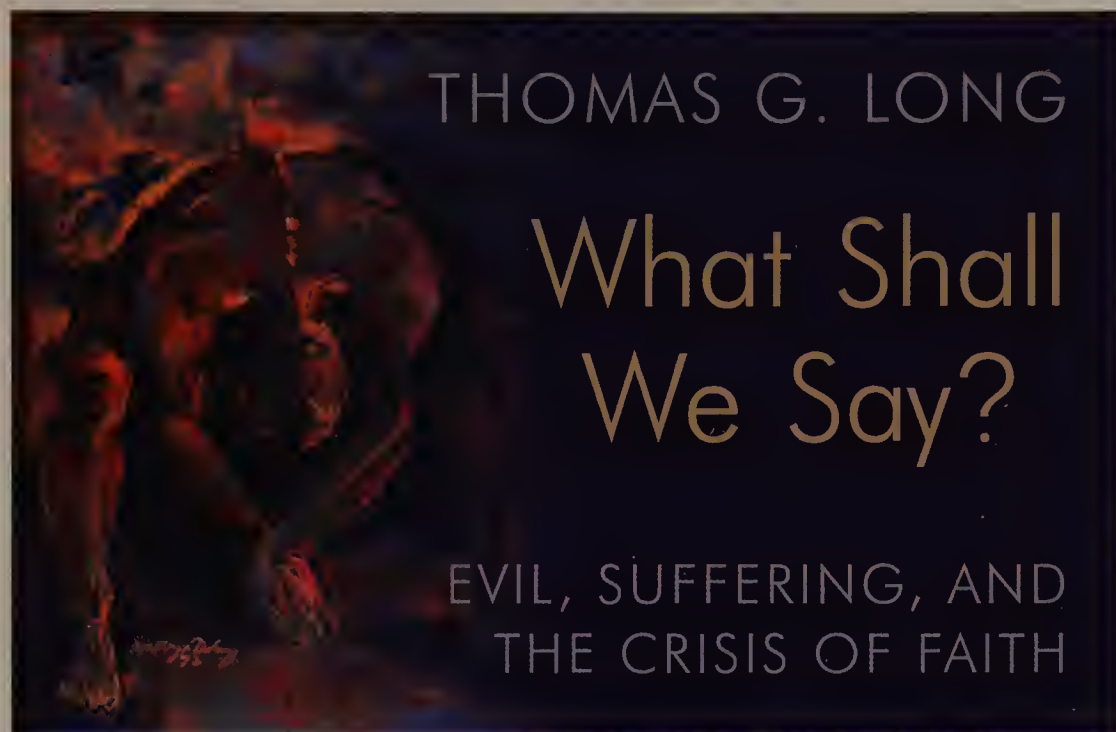
Unlike Williams, Wilson says comparatively little about the poem itself, which is subordinated to the sketching of "Dante and his age." At least when it comes to *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, he offers no sustained reading—perhaps because the first two canticles are deemed sufficiently straightforward and engaging not to need a critic's special pleading. *Paradiso*, however, is another story: prodigiously original, a challenge to follow in the blaze of its metaphoric light shows and dense with doc-

trine. Attention must be paid. The final canticle must be courted, savored, if the reader is find him- or herself in a "new dimension," inside the experience of the divine that the entire poem is moving toward.

At this point, in a chapter aptly titled "*In Paradisum*," the often tart literary biographer formerly burdened by doubts and reservations about his subjects, from C. S. Lewis to St. Paul, becomes something like a Dante evangelist. To be sure, he acknowledges Dante to be, at least in part, "the poet of hate, the poet of vengeance, of implacable resentment and everlasting feuds." But not in the end—despite the poet's ongoing anger that turns even the heavenly kingdom red with rage, so that Beatrice's final words are a denunciation of Florentine politics and papal bad faith. What matters to Wilson is that the *Paradiso* is "the boldest work of Western literature, since, if it achieves its effect, it will have ceased to be an imaginary narrative and will have led the reader to the vision experienced by the pilgrim-poet. Its aim is nothing less than to enable us to see God."

Actually, as Wilson admits, the work falls short of that enabling. All that the *Paradiso* can do is create the desire for such a vision, not deliver it. The entire canticle, then, is a sublime "tease," a realm of metaphor where likenesses are constructed only to evaporate before our eyes or be openly dismissed by the word-smith himself as inadequate. What does it mean to see God face to face? If such a sight could be revealed or expressed, there would be a 101st canto. Instead we get the resonant failure of the poem's magnificent close.

Wilson's final chapter, "Dante's Afterlife," reconstructs the long reception history of the *Commedia* and its author, which handily shows the ups and downs of critical opinion. The church was initially wary if not outright hostile: it couldn't help noting the poet's theological liberties, his excoriating treatment of the contemporary papacy, his opposition to ecclesiastical involvement in power and politics. By the 20th century, however, all of this would change: pope after pope has declared the alleged heretic to be "the most eloquent singer of the Christian idea" (Benedict XV in 1921), an ornament to the church as her beloved son (Paul VI in 1966) and a visionary of love whom the present pontiff counts as an



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inspiration for his own pontificate. What a turnaround, from being “the Devil’s vessel” (according to a Dominican polemicist in 1327) to being Vatican poet laureate for Benedict XVI.

Wilson focuses on the roller coaster of Dante’s literary rather than his religious reception. He tracks these changes in taste with a witty (and withering) assortment of quotes. The *altissimo poeta* of Boccaccio and Chaucer became in the Renaissance “a poet for bakers and cobblers,” his poem a “piece of bungling plagiarism.” Held in contempt in the 16th century, barely read (or published) in the 17th, Dante was scorned in the Enlightenment with special vehemence: neo-classical standards of decorum and a loathing of all things “Gothick” judged him unreadable.

In 1738 Horace Walpole, showing all the prejudices of the Establishment, described the author of the *Commedia* as “absurd, disgusting, in short a Methodist parson in Bedlam.” Twenty years later Voltaire was equally dismissive. Anyone “with a spark of good sense ought to blush at that mon-

For Wilson, Dante’s *Commedia* becomes a kind of scripture.

strous assemblage in Hell, of Dante and Virgil, of St. Peter and Madonna Beatrice”; it was all “stupidly extravagant and barbarous.”

With his expertise on the 19th century, Wilson is especially good on Dante’s rehabilitation in the English-speaking world after the appearance of *The Vision of Dante*, Henry Francis Cary’s 1814 translation of the *Commedia*. Cary had the good luck of being noticed and then publicized by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Among the English Romantics who shared Coleridge’s esteem were Blake, Keats, Shelley and Byron—all of them caught up in the new “Dante mania.” So too were Victorians the likes of Tennyson, Browning, the Rossettis and Ruskin. On the Continent there were Italian nationalists who found in the poet their *pater patriae*, and German enthusiasts like Jacob Burckhardt, for whom Dante was simply without equal: “In the whole spiritual or physical world there is hardly an important subject that the poet has not fathomed, and on which his utterances—often only with a few words—are not the most weighty of his time.” Nor was the New World far behind. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, a Dante Club gathered around Emerson, Charles Eliot Norton and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, whose translation of the *Commedia* marked an American fascination with the poet that remains unabated. (See, for instance, the Dante Today website, <http://learn.bowdoin.edu/italian/dante>.)

In the English-speaking world of the 20th century Dante continued to be *the* poet. The list of those who have been in ongoing conversation with him is both diverse and lengthy; it is also particularly rich in Americans, including James Merrill, Robert Lowell and W. S. Merwin. Dennis Looney’s 2011 *Freedom Readers* sheds new light on how Dante assumed a position of importance in African-American culture from the

late 1820s to the present. No less remarkable is Dante’s importance as a displaced person and “home exile” to Soviet-era Russians like Osip Mandelstam, Anna Akhmatova, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky.

Against the backdrop of Dante mania over the past 200 or so years—and one could say more about the poet’s impact on the visual arts and music as well as on literature—Wilson brings his book to a rushed conclusion. He speculates about the poet’s chances to speak meaningfully to our sad time, fragmented as it is into “a million million separate emptinesses.” People are lonely despite the easy connections of the Internet and disillusioned by institutions both sacred and secular. Wilson speaks personally at this point. “If the life-time experience of one reader is anything to go by,” the poem is “more than just a book”; it has the power transform the one who attends to its pages, “to make its own version of us.” In this light, the *Commedia* becomes for him a kind of scripture—centuries old, perennially new—in the way it can teach us how to read our world critically, counterculturally and therefore afresh.

In a hastily sketched series of “What ifs”—“What if the quest for the Just Society, the quest for the Ideal Lover, the quest for God could be found in some grand imaginative coalitions?”—Wilson wonders how the poet might perform this regenerative function. These brief interrogative conjectures come fast and furious, as if Wilson were not yet certain what he wanted to say. The book ends with a kind of altar call to the reader, the “you” who has been with him over the course of the book:

Whether you are losing your faith or returning to it (or a version of it); whether you are utterly disillusioned with politics or hopeful of political solutions to the injustices of the world; whether your deepest experience of love happened during childhood or is part of your sexual life as an adult, Dante, in his vast *Summa* of all these concerns, not only speaks of them more articulately than any other modern poet, but actually is a modern poet.

Reading this passage, I thought of the famous moment in the *Confessions* when a distraught Augustine hears an enigmatic cry coming from next door—*Tolle, lege*, “Take it and read.” He decides that it is a command to be obeyed, a summons to retrieve the text he had just put aside. When he then opens the Epistle to the Romans at random, he discovers a verse that seems written just for him, a scripture to challenge and change his entire existence. After a lifetime of reading, he suddenly finds what he needed: “In an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.”

Wilson never says that the *Commedia* played such a role in his conversion, but at least this reader suspects that what he discovered in his immersion in Dante was a good deal more than “a modern poet.” Perhaps he will turn from literary biography to autobiography and, in a confession all his own, tell that fuller story.



My Lenten fast

by Lauren Winner

I WORRY THAT avian flu is finally going to hit this year and I will get into my car and head west to my stepmother's remote farm, but I arrive too late for the quarantine, or my step-sister will pull up the same moment I do and there will be enough food for only one of us, and my father and his wife will be forced into some 21st-century blended-family Sophie's choice.

I worry that my identity is being stolen by someone right this second and every cent drained out of my bank account and a Lexus bought with a credit card in my name.

I worry that I have forgotten a crucially important appointment, or maybe that I've forgotten that I'm supposed to be giving a lecture in Saskatchewan right this second and there's a small group of people sitting in an auditorium somewhere, angry and wondering where I am.

I often think I've lost my driver's license. Driving to the airport, I pull out my license five times, ten times, just to make sure I wasn't somehow deluding myself when I last checked, three minutes ago back near exit 57.

It's breathless, compulsive behavior, behavior that makes no sense, that has no reason. It feels like diesel fuel is coursing through my sternum, and there is no focusing on anything other than the object of my panic: avian flu, my lost driver's license, suddenly empty checking accounts.

Or I boil water for tea and as the tea is steeping I check four times to make sure I've turned the stove burner off, and even after I leave the house that afternoon I worry that the stove is on, that the house is burning down, and I call my neighbor and ask him to go check. The stove is always off.

For as long as I can remember, anxiety has been my close companion, having a long time ago taken up residence in the small, second-floor bedroom of the house that is my body. Sometimes my anxiety takes long naps. Sometimes it throws parties. But I don't imagine it will ever tire of this neighborhood and move out for good.

In the ecclesial calendar, we are edging toward Lent. We will open each Sunday service with a long, somber litany of repentance. We will try to go with Jesus into the desert, to devote ourselves for 40 days, as the prayerbook puts it, to "self examination and repentance . . . prayer, fasting, and self denial; and . . . reading and meditating on God's holy Word." Some of us, as a token of this self-denial, will abstain from something during Lent: we won't eat sugar, or chocolate, or drink anything caffeinated or wine. One year, I gave up cheese for Lent. This year, I am giving up anxiety.

Left to my own devices, I find that the most challenging Lenten offering I can come up with is salt-and-vinegar potato chips or exercise, so most years I wait to be instructed by some angel in my life, like the priest who once told me to give up reading for 40 days, or the colleague who looked at me over her plastic flute of Prosecco at a Shrove Tuesday pancake party and told me that for Lent, I should give up saying yes.

This year, though, as we are inching toward Ash Wednesday—the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the transfiguration—no angels are turning up with my annual instructions. And so it is that as Lent approaches, I am sitting here at the island in Brandon and Lynette's kitchen, complaining that I don't know what quasi-fast to take up this season. "Maybe I should give up gummi bears," I say, popping a green one in my mouth; Lynette always keeps a small bowl of gummi bears on her island, and I always bypass the small bowls of healthy things like almonds and sunflower seeds and cranberries (dried) and eat all the palest yellow, pineapple-flavored gummi bears and then all the greens.

Brandon picks up his wine, in a blue pottery goblet that looks like a communion chalice, and says, "Maybe you should give up anxiety." He is probably joking, but it seems serious to me, it seems exactly right.

"Brandon," I say, "you're an angel." And I give up anxiety for Lent.

One way to give up anxiety is to medicate. I tried that once, some years ago—Paxil, for a year. It helped. It also made me gain 20 pounds, and when I finally got off it, it left me ear-ringing and migrained for over a month. I may go to the pharmacists' queue again someday—if the anxiety becomes too unpalatable, too unmanageable. But this Lent, I am going to try to give it up without a prescription.

"Her illness," Martin Luther wrote of an anxious woman he knew, "is not for the apothecaries . . . nor is it to be treated with the salves of Hippocrates, but it requires the powerful plasters of the Scriptures and the Word of God."

As Lent starts, I fall back on a practice I learned well over a decade ago when, having decided I couldn't stand one more argument with my mother about the glasses of vodka she

*Lauren Winner teaches at Duke Divinity School. This article is excerpted from her book *Still: Notes on a Mid-faith Crisis*, just published by HarperCollins and used by permission.*

insisted were water, I made my first foray to Al-Anon. It was there that someone made the completely shocking suggestion that my feelings needn't always get the last word in my head and that I could tell a feeling—fear, anxiety, some sort of obsession—that for the next 15 minutes, I wasn't going to pay it any heed. After a quarter of an hour, I could go back to the feeling if I want to, or I could choose to ignore it for another 15 minutes. I still live by quarter hours.

This distancing myself from a feeling for 15 minutes is possibly the most sanity-making practice anyone has ever offered me. It has short-circuited my spirals of hideous emotions more times than I can count, and during Lent I find myself invoking it at every turn: no anxiety for the next 900 seconds; maybe I will check for my driver's license or go online to see if my bank account has been hacked, but not now.

The insight that we can exercise some control over our thoughts and feelings is deep in Christianity, at least as deep as the desert. The Desert Fathers spoke of the eight *logismoi*: gluttony, lust, greed, anger, dejection, listlessness, vainglory and pride. The *logismoi* do not only tempt you to do destructive things—lust tempts you to fornicate, gluttony to overeat and so

I plan to sidle up alongside my anxiety with a prayer.

forth. The *logismoi* also teach you false stories about yourself: that you are dependent on food rather than God, that you are deserving of kingdoms.

The word *logismoi* doesn't translate very precisely—"passions" or, some people say, "tempting thoughts." I think of the term this way: the *logismoi* are false distractions that threaten to colonize your imagination. They turn your head. They take over your brain and jerk you out of reality.

The desert saints said that the beginning of renouncing a thought is simply noticing it. That is part of what I'm doing in my quarter hours; I am noticing and naming—and then, for a few minutes, quarantining—a thought. But the Desert Fathers say something more: after noticing a thought, replace it with a prayer. So if your colonizing distraction is about food—it is 2 p.m., and you ate lunch 90 minutes ago, but you find yourself daydreaming about the muffins you baked last night or the cookies 'n' cream yogurt you have sitting in the refrigerator—one thing you can do is notice the thought and then tell yourself you can't think about the yogurt. The other thing you can do is replace the yogurt with prayer. That is what I try to do to my anxiety this Lent—not just ignore it for quarter-hour increments, but sidle up alongside it with a prayer.

During Lent, I repeat this prayer, from the back of the prayerbook: "O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God." I find myself repeating it ten times a day, saying it like an incantation that may drive my anxiety away.

Sometimes I say the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of

God, have mercy on me, a sinner." In bed at night, I revert to the rhyming patterns of childhood: "Now I lay me down to sleep." (Perhaps the refrain "if I die before I wake" should itself produce anxiety, but it turns out to do the opposite—it articulates a plan; if I die before I wake, I won't find myself in a panicky, unknown situation, out of control, precisely because this plan is in place—if I die before I wake, God will take my soul and I'll be fine.)

In the middle of class one day, I am seized by the thought that I left my stove on that morning, making tea, making oatmeal, and that by now the house has long since burned down, and the fire department didn't know how to reach me, and I will come home to black hulks of char. In class we are discussing Richard Hooker's theology of the Eucharist—how he says that you can no more give an unbaptized person the Eucharist than you can feed a corpse. I think I say very little for the last half of class; it is all I can do not to bolt, run to a telephone, run home, which is what I start to do as soon as class is over, dump my notebooks on my office floor and trot out of the building and begin the two-mile walk home at a very fast clip, and then in the middle of the Duke gardens I stop. I crouch down and begin to say something from the psalms over and over: "Be pleased, O God, to deliver me; O Lord make haste to help me."

In the fourth century these words by the psalmist were recommended by the desert monk John Cassian above all other "pious formulas" for prayer, saying that the verse "is an impregnable wall for all who are laboring under the attacks of demons."

There, crouched by the duck pond like a soccer ball, I know I look deranged, but the panic about my stove really might be a demonic attack. I know I look like a desperate crazy lady talking to herself, rocking back and forth. I don't know exactly how long I am there or how many students walk by me, though I think the sun sets a little in the sky as I am repeating these words from the Psalms; I mean them as I have meant very few things in my life, and I determine that I will stay there for as many minutes, hours, as it takes, that I will not race home to behold my standing-up house, my not-on-fire kitchen, my half-eaten bowl of oatmeal calmly in the sink.

Later, I walk home. I make myself take a turn through the art museum on my way. I make myself stop off for dinner at a restaurant on Ninth Street. Everything is slow. Slowly, I am beginning to see what this anxiety is about, to see its lineaments: it has something to do with being left alone to handle a situation I am not competent to handle; it has something to do with being known and unknown, with the sense that I go through life hidden, masked (even all this first-person prose—I write it to hide in plain sight). And to the degree that I am masked I always risk being left alone—for once the mask comes off, once my friends and intimates, my charmed students, even my beloved, loving aunts see the corruptions and shames of my real heart, they will vanish, and I will be left alone with the tea-steeping-house-fire, left alone outside my stepmother's farm with the avian flu, alone.

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me from this.

CC

Battle scars

by Jane Donovan

WHEN MIKE WALKED into my office for an academic advising appointment, I knew something was wrong. His normally pale face was a deep lobster red. His hair was mussed, and he was carrying a large, empty cardboard box. Instead of discussing his courses he rambled incoherently about a trio of ducks that were following him around the university campus. The purpose of the box, he said, was to help him catch the ducks, take them to the banks of a nearby river and release them so that they would stop bothering him. It gradually dawned on me that he was hallucinating.

As the semester progressed, Mike's mental health deteriorated dramatically. He was expelled from two of his classes, was arrested in the student union for being disruptive, and then discharged a fire extinguisher in the back of a police car. I began to receive calls, visits and e-mails from distraught students who were in his classes. They were afraid of Mike and wanted him removed from campus. I followed the standard procedures for a student crisis, working through the university system to address Mike's situation. But as his condition rapidly worsened, the Lutheran campus chaplain decided to call Mike's parents, who rushed to campus and located a facility with the kind of mental health services that Mike so desperately needed. Mike was hospitalized for ten weeks, then took a leave of absence from the university.

Mike is one of thousands of veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who have attended or are attending college on the new GI Bill. As a large, public university in the American heartland, West Virginia University has had significant numbers of student veterans on its campus for several years, and many of them are struggling with religious concerns and psychological conditions. The university has gone to great lengths to support its student veterans, offering veterans-only sections for some classes, an Office of Veterans Affairs to help them with GI Bill paperwork, and a student veterans club where they can meet and socialize. They are eligible for psychological services through the student mental health clinic.

As a faculty member and academic adviser, I've had several worrisome experiences with student veterans. As I search for resources to help me deal more effectively with their needs, I've realized that the United States is at the beginning of a crisis in caring for this generation of veterans.

The *Washington Post's* 2007 series on poor conditions and insensitive care at Walter Reed Army Hospital included the story of a West Virginia veteran of the Iraq War who commit-

ted suicide while he was hospitalized. Members of the state legislature were shocked by the article and contacted the U.S. Department of Defense to request information on West Virginians who were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They asked how many were serving, how many had died as a result of their military service and how many were wounded. The Defense Department could not or would not answer their questions, so the legislature commissioned WVU psychology professor Joseph Scotti to study the mental health needs of veterans living in West Virginia. His findings are relevant for all of America's small towns and rural areas.

Scotti's study suggests that rural veterans may have significantly higher rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and clinical depression than other veterans. His research team mailed questionnaires to 6,400 veterans in the state's database of persons who have received one-time financial bonuses for military service, and the team received 1,058 completed surveys—a surprisingly high response rate. Nearly half of the respondents' answers suggested that they suffer from PTSD and/or depression. Scotti notes that many of the 50 percent who don't have a diagnosis of PTSD/depression still may need mental health services for conditions such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), panic disorder or generalized anxiety disorder. Veterans who live in rural areas—communities of 2,500 residents or fewer—have an even higher rate of PTSD/depression: 56 percent.

Although 82 percent of respondents said that professional mental health services are available to them, only 26 percent have sought care from a professional provider. Instead, 33 percent have sought out clergy for help. The more rural the area in which the veteran lives, the more likely he or she is to seek care from local clergy rather than from a mental health professional.

In general, veterans are hesitant to seek care from a mental health professional for two major reasons: stigma and access. Active-duty troops fear that they will be regarded as weak or unreliable and that their careers may subsequently be affected. Soldiers who are near the end of their tours of duty fear that admitting a mental health problem could delay their return home. Janet Salbert, pastor of a United Methodist church located a few miles from the Pentagon, confirms these asser-

Jane Donovan is a lecturer in religious studies at West Virginia University.

tions. She reports that veterans in her congregation are considerably more willing to seek help from the church. "For some of these folks, in the jobs they do in the military, there is an issue of confidentiality, but they also have an almost wordless allegiance to the military culture," Salbert said. "To come back and open that up is problematic. When veterans are in a room together, they are free to talk. Otherwise, they are not." In a public relations effort intended to encourage soldiers to seek

A Bible study may lead veterans to talk about their combat experiences.

mental health care, U.S. Army four-star general Carter Ham announced in *USA Today* that he has PTSD and has received counseling—not from a mental health professional, but from a military chaplain.

Access to care is also problematic. The Veterans Administration operates the largest health care system in the United States and includes hospitals, outpatient clinics and community-based clinics with specialized programs for PTSD, but many veterans resist VA care. Eligibility rules, complicated insurance arrangements and concerns about the quality of VA care can be discouraging. Some small-town veterans worry, probably unnecessarily, about issues of confidentiality. One veteran fretted, "My mom's next door neighbor works at the VA hospital. Does she have access to my file? Will she tell my mom what's in there?"

In rural areas, the disincentives are hard to overcome. Even though West Virginia boasts four VA hospitals, seven vet centers and two mobile vet centers, some areas of the state are too remote for this governmental network to reach. Parts of the state are more than three hours' drive from the nearest veterans' facility, with no public transportation available. The West Virginia legislature recently appropriated \$240,000 to fund four clinical social workers, one for each of the VA hospitals, to reach out to veterans in remote areas. The hospitals also provide drivers. Even so, some veterans still resist treatment.

Issues of stigma and access aside, the preference for pastoral care is well known in West Virginia. A licensed clinical social worker with the Veterans Administration hospital in Huntington, West Virginia, has pub-

licly admitted that she regularly refers her patients to the hospital's chaplain or other clergy for "talk therapy." This is worrisome, as most clergy are not ready for the challenge of pastoral care and counseling for veterans who suffer from the complexities of PTSD, TBI, depression and other combat-related conditions. Very few clergy are trained mental health professionals. Ministers in denominations that require a seminary education have probably taken courses in pastoral care and completed some clinical pastoral education. But a significant percentage of the clergy in rural areas have no seminary education because their denominations and independent churches have no educational requirements for ordination. What resources, other than compassion, do they have for dealing with the mental health needs of a returned veteran who has been diagnosed with PTSD, TBI and/or depression?

In some parts of the country, caring for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan is further complicated because many of them—more than 500,000 American combatants—were in the National Guard rather than the regular military. National Guard units normally report to the governors of the states in which they are located and deploy in situations of domestic emergency, mostly natural disasters. They report to the president of the United States in time of war, but before September 11, 2001, it was highly unusual for National Guard units to be deployed in overseas combat. Members are civilians who are

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RENEWING CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS: ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY THEN AND NOW



employed in civilian jobs. They enlist expecting to be “weekend warriors” who train one weekend a month and are called out in a natural disaster or other national crisis.

But in the last ten years, for the first time in U.S. history, tens of thousands of National Guard members have been used as frontline combat troops, many of whom have deployed two or even three times. Some return home to find that their jobs have been filled, and they cannot find new employment in the recession. Adding to the stress of unexpected deployments is their length and frequency, often with little respite between call-ups. When they do return, National Guard units do not go to a military base but to their families and their predeployment life. They have no buffer zone, no compound full of other soldiers with whom they’ve shared experiences of combat and lengthy separations from their loved ones, no doctor’s office or mental health clinic on the property. The abrupt change from full-time soldier to full-time civilian is so disorienting that it takes weeks if not months before some veterans can work up the psychological strength to seek the counseling they need.

The good news is that resources for clergy are beginning to become available. Several accredited seminaries, including Wesley Theological Seminary, Iliff School of Theology and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, are offering D.Min. programs for military chaplains. Routledge, Abingdon

and other religious publishers are starting to produce books and other materials for clergy who are working with veterans. William Sean Lee, a chaplain with the Maryland National Guard, developed the Partners in Care program, which connects local congregations to National Guard troops and their family members in need of help and support; it has been adopted by the Guard in other states and shows great promise in helping to break down barriers of isolation for those who are not on or near a military base. Barbara Van Dahlen’s Give an Hour program encourages mental health professionals to donate one hour of psychotherapy each week to a veteran. Kyria Henry, the daughter of a Vietnam veteran, founded paws4vets, which trains and places service dogs as companion animals for veterans who suffer from PTSD, TBI and other combat-related physical and psychological conditions.

These programs are effective and helpful, but we also need resources that address the spiritual concerns of combat veterans. Nearly every veteran with whom I’ve talked carries a burden of guilt about actions he or she took in Iraq or Afghanistan, such as a split-second decision to open fire in an uncertain circumstance that led to the death of a civilian. Others are haunted by atrocities they discovered: the practice field where the Iraqi national soccer team was executed, or the gas chamber in which Saddam Hussein’s troops executed Kurds during the first Gulf War. These veterans fear for their souls and long to experience God’s grace and forgiveness.

In an effort to respond to their needs, I developed an interventional Bible study curriculum using scriptures associated with the Babylonian exile of ancient Israel. I’ve taught it several times to groups of veterans, and they’ve responded positively. Bible study gets veterans talking about their combat experiences in a safe, comfortable place with other veterans who understand them, and it encourages them to bring God into the conversation. Every such initiative, no matter how modest, is a tool that can help build a safe haven for a traumatized veteran.

Mike’s story has a happy ending, at least so far. He returned to classes in January 2009 and graduated from WVU. He is gainfully employed, faithfully takes his prescribed medications, understands the vigilance necessary to keep his conditions under control and is happy and productive. But for every Mike there are also many other men and women struggling to integrate their combat experience into their lives. Ready or not, the church will be asked to help them.

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by M. Craig Barnes

The good sheepdog

I'VE LEARNED A LOT about being a pastor from Esau, our family's hairy sheepdog. The American Kennel Club calls him a bearded collie, but that's misleading since he looks nothing like Lassie. He's actually a Scottish version of the Old English sheepdog, which I believe makes him a Presbyterian.

I have always been uneasy with thinking of myself as the shepherd of our congregation. That role belongs to Jesus Christ. I've learned that it's far more helpful to think of myself as a sheepdog that nudges sheep toward the only Savior of the flock.

My favorite household chore is to take Esau around the block for his morning walk. We do this as liturgy. As we shuffle along, both of us are waking up to the new day that has come as a grace from God. Typically, Esau reminds me to greet the day with excitement.

Without fail at some point in the walk he will stop, stand very still, lift his nose high into the air, and get a sniff of something that excites him so much that his tail has to wag. I have no idea what he is sensing, but every morning when we go through this routine I wish I had his nose to receive what I cannot. And I envy his tail that is always eager to express praise for what is lying around out there in creation.

Part of my call as the pastor of a local congregation is to sense the goodness of what is around us, even if a parishioner in a hospital bed cannot. This doesn't mean that I am unaware of the dangers, hurts and grief that also abound. Neither is Esau. He senses the arrival of a thunderstorm long before anyone else in the house and typically runs for the sanctuary of his crate in the family room. As a pastor, it is my job to understand the anxiety that propels our people to gather together at church every Sunday morning in hopes of finding sanctuary from the storms of life. But I'm also called to wag with excitement over the discovery that God's grace is always in the air.

Anyone can leave the sanctuary and get a whiff of this, but you have to pay attention. And that's just another reason why we come to worship in a place where our spiritual senses are sharpened.

When Esau and I walk around the block we often encounter another dog. As soon as Esau sees it approaching, he suddenly lies so flat that he almost disappears into the ground. We didn't train him to do this. Our assumption is that this is instinctive for herding dogs. When they were working the fields caring for the sheep and saw a threat appear, these dogs learned to disappear for a moment to give them time to decide how best to respond.

After our worship services on Sunday mornings, when I am milling around the fellowship hall during coffee hour and see someone coming toward me with resolution in her or his face,

it is critical that I take a few nanoseconds to go flat. This gives me a moment to pray for Spirit-filled guidance for how best to respond to the agenda that is coming my way. Do I engage? Do I run for the door? Like all sheepdogs I have to be more attentive to the Good Shepherd than to the many other agendas in a congregation. We pastors always need to remind ourselves that Jesus doesn't call us to take on every need that comes our way.

At the end of December, when the hectic demands of Advent church programs are finally over, our family retires for a few days of sabbatical to a winter beach in Delaware. Of course we bring Esau. His favorite part of this vacation is the freedom to run unleashed on the empty beach, where, like any self-respecting dog, he chases birds. I've noticed over the years that he never runs straight at them. Instead, being a herding dog, he runs in an arc trying to take them by surprise.

Long ago I learned the value of not approaching problem parishioners with head-on confrontation but by coming at them "slant," as Eugene Peterson calls it. It's ineffective to tell someone, "You have to stop hijacking the worship committee with your personal agendas." More redemption is found by nipping at their heels with the question, "What are you worried about?"

The role of shepherd belongs not to me, but to Jesus Christ.

When I take Esau to a dog park, he's the only one who is not having fun; instead, he keeps trying to round up the other dogs. He can't help it. It's just in him to worry about the order of the community, which is also part of the pastor's calling. Ministry often isn't fun, and when we pastors do find joy it's not because we spent all day chasing Frisbees. Our delight has to come from helping others gather around the Good Shepherd.

Thinking of myself as a sheepdog saves me from the illusion that the pastor is necessary. I am cherished, and called by the Shepherd to serve the flock. But I can save no one. Getting off that hook is the best way I know to handle the inevitable failures in ministry and still enjoy a long tenure of service to a congregation.

No pastor survives for long without an intimate devotional life. Even a dog gets this. There are times, usually at the end of the day, when Esau just wants to cuddle up next to his master, get a scratch behind the ears and hear "Good boy."

M. Craig Barnes teaches at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

IN Review

Black and white thinking

by Edward P. Antonio

Redeeming *Mulatto* presents a complex argument about theology and race. It is impossible to do it justice in a short review. Brian Bantum persuasively challenges traditional ways of thinking about race in the United States by theologically retrieving interracial identity as an important category that has been unduly neglected. In this way he addresses the American tendency to understand race relations in terms of the binary opposition between black and white.

Bantum describes the historical experience of being mulatto/a by suggesting that race in the U.S. functions like religion or as a form of discipleship into which we are all recruited. He develops a mulattic Christology in which Christ is a tragic mulatto who refuses racial kinship identity precisely by occupying a neither/nor space of in-between existence. Finally, he describes how we can become reborn into genuine Christian discipleship beyond the constraints of racial belonging and loyalties.

Several points of departure sustain the book's many arguments. First, Bantum contends that race is rooted in the history of slavery and the classification of peoples into racial groups that characterized human encounters in the New World. Second, the classification of races was created by the European and American (that is, Western) assertion that white particularity was the only viable way of being a person. Classification was premised on the racial purity of whiteness and on the idea that races are natural and fixed categories. There was white on the one hand and black on the other.

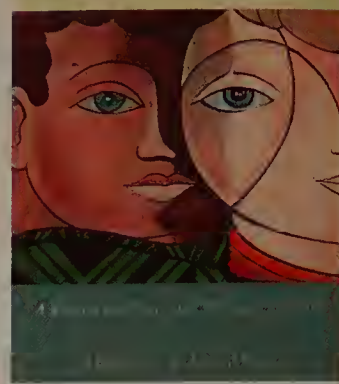
However, Bantum says that from the very beginning this binary was compromised when people of different "races"

transgressed the boundaries of race, and mixed-race children "of rape, illicit desire, and even possibly love were born in this colonial encounter." These children existed "in between categories of colonizer and colonized, human and nonhuman, slave and free."

According to Bantum, "mixed-race bodies make visible a drama of identity that every body, every life engaged in then, during its time, and now, during our time. Race is the drama of our present condition." We can see this in our churches, homes, marriages and social and individual desires. The privileging of race in terms of the essential purity of whiteness and the essential inferiority of other races became not only the context in which Christian identity and Christian personhood were figured out, but also precisely the point at which race was shown to be both false and sinful.

One of Bantum's key arguments is that race is false, "a tragic illusion" because there is nothing natural about it. The existence of persons of mixed race shows this to be the case. In addition to being false, racial identity as the basis of life is sinful because it involves making choices and decisions and engaging in patterns of life that are incongruous with Christian discipleship. Indeed, Bantum goes further to say that racial identity is itself a form of discipleship because race is an ideal, transcendent reality in which whiteness defines what it means to be truly human. Racial discipleship is about how we become bound to certain racial kinship structures, and it is about the negotiation of everyday existence through race as a way of believing. It is about how we are formed and received into certain communities. White bodies are believed to be biologically and morally pure, and white-

REDEEMING
MULATTO



Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity

By Brian Bantum

Baylor University Press, 260 pp., \$34.95

ness is offered as a form of salvation to people of mixed race.

Through an analysis of three novels—Charles Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*, James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and Nella Larsen's *Passing*—Bantum persuasively shows how mulatto/a lives are put in a situation of refusing, desiring or accommodating whiteness as a form of social well-being or salvation. The phenomenon of passing as white, Bantum suggests, is a kind of soteriology.

In the second part of the book Bantum develops an interesting view of the person of Christ: Jesus is a tragic mulatto who refuses the claims of racial purity precisely by being mixed—fully God and fully human. Bantum is clear that neither a black Jesus nor the Jesus of tradition can save us because in both we project our own wishes and racial hopes onto Christian discipleship. The neither/nor formula is key to everything Bantum does in this book. A mulatto/a is neither black nor white, and Bantum initiates a disruptive neither/nor Christology. Christ creates a mulattic people, a people that has been transformed by Jesus' refusal to take for granted regular kinship structures: Who is my mother and who is my brother? Jesus displaces our racial identities both by redefining tradi-

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tional familial bonds and by offering us a new way of being in his own life. In Christ the tragedy of racially based identities is vanquished. Bantum invites us into a new existence, an interstitial or in-between Christian life beyond race.

I conclude with a few critical remarks. Everything Bantum says about race can be said without assimilating race to the idea of religion or discipleship. The argument is forced and, as far as I can see, simply does not work. We have been down this path before. Marxism was once declared a religion; lately capitalism has been thought of in similar terms. Some have even described forms of obsessive behavior as religious. It is not clear what is to be gained in making such claims. Racism is totally wrong whether or not it possesses something akin to a religious structure. Participation, formation, loyalty and so on are germane topics in discussions about race, but this does not require an appeal to religion because religion does not have a monopoly on the production and formation of human identities.

The book makes strong use of the idea of performance and drama. Race is performance; identity is performance; discipleship is performance. This is Bantum's way of saying that identities are not natural but are socially created and are lived out as choices. But the overemphasis on performance creates the impression that race is all a matter of playing and acting. This runs the danger of undermining another emphasis of Bantum's book: the tragic nature of mulatto/a existence. If everything is performance, what is there to stop one from concluding that the tragedy of mulatto/a life is merely staged, a matter of performance and not reality? What is the relationship between appearance and reality?

These criticisms aside, this is an important book that makes a genuine breakthrough in discussions of theology and race. Bantum succeeds in taking us beyond the binary impasses of black theology and the racial (if not racist) indifference of white Christianity.

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The Cross and the Lynching Tree

By James H. Cone

Orbis, 224 pp., \$28.00

My great-grandfather was lynched. It was not a big affair in the town square; it happened on a dusty southern road. But its imprint and the communal denial in the small southern town that is our homeland have had lasting reverberations for generations of my family.

I begin with this disclosure because to adequately appreciate James Cone's reason for writing this work, it is necessary to recognize that few African Americans are more than a few degrees removed from a similar narrative and the experience that it creates. It is the ubiquity of this experience that makes it a theological category. The theological methodology used by black theology is one which gives primacy to experience: experience of not only the divine but also of the

vicissitudes of human pain and suffering caused by the workings of evil.

Whereas in other works Cone broadly takes on the corruption of Christian practice and proclamation and Christians' complicity with racism, in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* he focuses on a type of complicity that involves the church not just in corruption but in evil. The complicity on which he focuses is the Christianization of lynching: the common practice of murdering (*killing* seems too sanitized a term) African Americans as a means of social and political control after the demise of Reconstruction. Frequently these deaths were torturous and were made public spectacle.

More often than not, the public renderings of black bodies were carried out by "good Christian folk"—people who had become convinced that their dedication to the regime of white supremacy that demanded these executions was part and parcel of their Christian identity. It is no coincidence that most of the lynchings from the late 19th to mid-20th century occurred in the Bible Belt. Churchgoing lynchers were often murdering other churchgoing Christians who were of the same communion: Baptists killed Baptists and so on.

The *Cross and the Lynching Tree* is a theological meditation on a dimension of the lethal oppression experienced by African Americans that has been formative for both the faith and civic posture of the black community for a very long time. Cone foregrounds lynching and its ubiquitous threat as the concrete denial of African Americans' claims to a recognition of their full humanity and of their citizenship in the body politic and in the household of God. The book is also a reflection on contemporaneous and historical erasure as a means of cultivating what my colleague Mary McClintock Fulkerson terms the "obliviousness of whiteness" to black suffering.

Cone treats Reinhold Niebuhr as exemplary of the tendency in 20th-century liberalism to treat the violation of black bodies by lynching as a national tragedy but not as an ecclesial failure, and he demonstrates the ways that the church was and still is captive to the hegemonic imagination of modernity, in which the

only bodies that are finally precious to God (not merely of some value) are white bodies. Had Cone's reflection stopped with the analysis of Niebuhr, this book would have largely been of a piece with his earlier projects. What distinguishes this book and makes it a fitting capstone to his career is the way that he uses the creativity of African-American theological and cultural sources to transform a central category of the Christian faith so that it resists the co-option of the faith by the forces of lethal iniquity.

He does this with a masterful interpretation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s thought and a careful reading of the African-American literary tradition as it reflects on the terror and religious tragedy of lynching. Cone uses these sources to show how the response of the African-American Christian tradition to this tragedy not only provides ethical means to talk about unearned violence but, more important, illumines ways that the doctrine of the cross might redeem, and be redeemed in, the project of theology in a situation of lethal racial oppression. This is no small thing given that we have witnessed throughout the past century the participation of Christians in not only lethal but ultimately genocidal oppression and violence.

Cone invites us to revisit and rethink the theology of the cross so it does not require an act of historical amnesia that denudes the cross of its redemptive power. Cone says, "The church's most vexing problem today is how to define itself by the gospel of Jesus' cross." How does the church bear witness to the power of life in the midst of a world awash in violence, lethal inequity and the impoverishment of bodies and souls? How does the church witness to the resurrection without being oblivious of those suffering on the cross or a tree? It is my sense that addressing this problem has been Cone's project from the beginning. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* is the fruit of a career that has followed an intuition; would that we all were gifted with such a still small voice.

Reviewed by Stephen G. Ray Jr., who teaches theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and is executive director of the Society for the Study of Black Religion.



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Ravished by Beauty: The Surprising Legacy of Reformed Spirituality

By Belden C. Lane

Oxford University Press, 328 pp., \$29.95

In this splendid book Belden Lane has made a double contribution—to the reordering of our perspectives on creation and to our understanding of the Reformed tradition as a contributor to this reordering. A nature lover, hiker and camper as well as a first-rate scholar, he combines a passion for sensitive stewardship of creation with profound insight into the nature perspectives of Reformed spirituality and into the interconnections between Reformed spirituality and the broader stream of world spirituality as they both relate to creation.

Readers not well acquainted with Calvin or the Reformed tradition may register even more surprise than Lane himself confesses about his discovery, for a quite different slice of doctrine—double predestination and God’s absolute sovereignty—has dominated popular thinking about Calvin’s theology. To

interpret Reformed spirituality from that angle overlooks another side of Calvin’s central teaching, one much closer to what we find in the writings of the great contemplatives of earlier centuries, such as Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure and others who posited an intimacy between God and creation.

Persons who have had Dort Calvinism’s five points drilled into them will experience some shock when they read Lane’s account of Calvin’s nature-embracing theology. Professor of theological studies, American religion and history of spirituality at St. Louis University, Lane points out that Calvin viewed the world as a theater of God’s glory and connected the awesome mystery of the cosmos with the mystery of God’s inner life as the Trinity.

God’s purpose in redemption is, as Irenaeus posited, the recapitulation of all things, which will redound to God’s glory. God’s continual creation keeps the universe from falling apart, and every creature in the universe joins in constant praise. In a bold phrasing, Lane says of Calvin, “The Genevan Reformer’s sense of God’s intimate relation to the natural world was so intense—he perceived

God’s radiant glory to pervade the world so completely—that his thought bordered at times on pantheism.” God’s purpose in clothing nature with beauty was to awaken desire and bring all creation back to God’s self in ravishing delight. Calvin knew the danger of misplaced desire, but he also saw human desire as a mirror of God’s desire for relationship. We are all creatures of desire, the desire to praise the Creator. We humans can learn from “the school of the beasts.” Our praise not only stirs desire for God but generates the life it celebrates. Worship has great power!

In the 17th century the Puritans walked in the path charted by Calvin, linking nature and desire. By the time they assembled at Westminster in 1646, Lane asserts, desire had become “the heart and blood of Puritan spirituality.” The Puritans knew that desire could lead them astray, so they took steps to guard against excesses. They also looked to nature in its wildness to purge them.

Jonathan Edwards, key interpreter of the Great Awakening of the 18th century

Reviewed by E. Glenn Hinson, who teaches spirituality and church history.

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ry, seems to epitomize Lane's central concepts and imagery. Lane characterizes Edwards as "a naturalist as well as a theologian." The New England pastor considered the natural world to be alive with the presence of God: it communicates God's trinitarian glory and thus prompts human hearts to long more deeply for God. In Edwards's theology, the Trinity is more a beauty to be enjoyed than a power to be feared. The world of nature replicates the beauty of the holy Trinity. It is an effluence of God's own abundant life into the world. No other theme in Edwards's work surpasses his conviction that the whole creation aims at this conscious celebration of God's beauty.

Like the Puritans before him, Edwards considered nature a second "book," alongside scripture, that teaches people to know God. In the revivifying work of salvation, believers receive a new sense of the sensory environment, and their challenge is to bring the world to a consciousness of its beauty in God. In contrast to deistic thinkers of his own era who denied God's involvement in the world, Edwards thought that science revealed a God of intimate relationships hidden within the structure of the universe.

What are the implications of God's being intimately involved in the ebb and flow of desire in the whole creation, in both its loveliness and its wildness? What does this mean for how we relate to God's world and how we must change? Can Reformed spirituality, vital in shaping attitudes toward nature from the Reformation to the Great Awakening, exert a significant impact in an age dominated by post-Enlightenment rational-

ism—even an impact on the faithful who are influenced by this tradition?

As I have meditated on this brilliant study, I have been reading Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, whose "objectivism" represents the polar opposite of *Ravished by Beauty*. Rand's atheist heroes, absorbed with themselves and indifferent to the world around them, could not make any sense of a world that God is continually creating to evoke desire for the Divine and in which nature as well as humans yearns passionately to be restored to oneness with the Creator. They would feel more comfortable with the deistic disavowal of divine involvement in the natural order.

Some Christians of Calvinist background will find it hard to accept what Lane has disclosed about Reformed spirituality and nature. They go to the opposite extreme to repudiate modern science's portrayal of a pulsating universe in which every particle connects in some way with the whole—insisting that it is not possible to believe both the Bible and science.

Lane has drawn on the wisdom of Reformed spirituality to frame an ecological ethic that speaks to the human condition. Attentiveness to God through the books of both nature and scripture offers the greatest likelihood that we will awaken to our intimate interconnection with the whole creation. It quickens us to question a failed stewardship that leads to climate change, endemic pollution and the destruction of mountains. If "all the world's alive with God," and the whole creation lifts its voice to praise God, it's time for us to finally join the mighty chorus.

BookMarks

And So It Goes: Kurt Vonnegut: A Life

By Charles J. Shields
Henry Holt, 528 pp., \$30.00

"I myself am a work of fiction," Vonnegut once remarked. Shields's biography *And So It Goes* has as much intrigue and tragedy and as many tortured relationships as a good novel. Shields, who had Vonnegut's cooperation in what turned out to be the last year of his life, also had access to over 1,500 letters. Vonnegut's son, coexecutor of the estate, did not give permission to quote from some of these letters. Shields nevertheless was able to make good use of them in telling the story of an American novelist from the last century best known for *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a novel based on his own dreadful time as a prisoner of war during the firebombing of Dresden.

Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming a Bore

By Peter L. Berger
Prometheus, 264 pp., \$26.00

Berger was arguably one of the most important sociologists of the past half century, one who worked in the interstices between society and religion. He was able to change his mind over time because he paid attention to "facts on the ground." He once believed in the inevitability of secularity in modern, industrialized societies, but the resurgence of religion in the United States and other Western countries forced him to revise his perspective. Modernity didn't necessarily lead to secularity but to pluralism, including religious pluralism. This is less a full autobiography and more of an intellectual memoir. Berger relates how he fell into a vocation of sociology and what impulses led to his various projects in service to that vocation.

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Film

The Interrupters Directed by Steve James

The Chicago-based documentarian Steve James isn't a great filmmaker, but he has a journalist's nose for a great story. His beat is the challenges faced by low-income city kids: the teens in *Hoop Dreams* who are hopeful that basketball will be their ticket to a better life; the young Chicagoans in *The Interrupters*, his latest, whose lives are blighted by the cycle of violence.

The subject of *The Interrupters* is a program called CeaseFire: Violence Interrupters. CeaseFire attempts to intervene before one violent act provokes another and to help young people get off the wrong track. What the group is fighting against is staggering: generations of poverty and crime, the machismo and the fear of appearing weak that come with gang violence, the mind-set that history and survival justify retribution.

Most disturbing of all is the fatalism that CeaseFire encounters. On a memorial wall dedicated to recent shooting victims, someone has scribbled, "I am next." In one of the film's most powerful sequences, funeral home director Spencer Leak reports that the young people who attend the funerals of their friends and relatives appear to be checking them out, as if attending a dress rehearsal for their own funeral.

What the Violence Interrupters have going for them is that their own lives once seemed as hopeless as those of the people they're trying to help. Tio Hardiman, the organization's cofounder, used to be a street hustler. Cobe Williams served 12 years for drug trafficking. Ameena Matthews, abused from age nine, was the only girl in an Englewood gang. Eddie Bocanegra went to jail for a revenge killing.

Yet each of them managed to turn away from a devouring past. Their street cred and their empathy often make it



ACTIVISTS AGAINST VIOLENCE: Former gang members from Chicago's mean streets try to help others turn their lives around.

possible for them to get a hearing. And they're fearless: attending a vigil for a boy shot in front of his apartment, where he was simply listening to his radio, Ameena lectures the teenagers to get the idea of vengeance out of their heads. Pointing to a kid of maybe 12, hanging out with the older boys, she insists that they "teach him righteous."

Ameena is the most memorable of the crew. A ferocious and sensitive Muslim woman, she balances the care of her own kids with the hours she spends working for CeaseFire and playing big sister to a troubled 18-year-old woman. But each Interrupter's emotional commitment catches you up. The people they try to help are equally compelling: Latoya Oliver, who wants someone to save her two sons; a furious druggie known as Flamo who, little by little, starts to get both his anger and his addiction in check; Li'l Mikey Davis, a 17-year-old who comes home from jail and apologizes to the people he wronged.

The movie's year-in-the-life-of-the-city structure makes it meandering and repetitive. But it's full of people you wouldn't want to miss getting to know. Spencer Leak fought for civil rights in the '60s, and he talks about what it felt like for an African American of his generation to see Obama elected. "But while I'm seeing the president of the United States on TV," he tells the camera, "I'm still burying black kids. It just doesn't make sense to me." Leak's mournful baflement echoes through the rest of this poignant movie.

The Iron Lady

Directed by Phyllida Lloyd

Starring Meryl Streep and Jim Broadbent

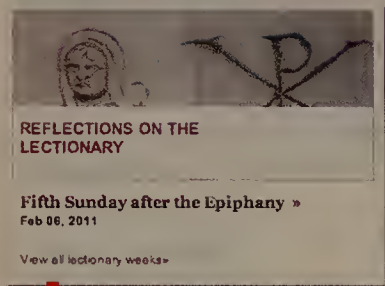
The Iron Lady, which stars Meryl Streep as Margaret Thatcher, is the worst biopic since *Nixon*. It intercuts Thatcher's old age, when her memory has begun to play tricks on her and she keeps up a running conversation with the ghost of her dead husband, Denis (Jim Broadbent), with episodes from her political career. But it's so cautious that it lacks a coherent point of view, and it's so scattered that it tells you almost exactly nothing.

Most of the political narrative consists of montages of news reports and voice-over collages that carefully juxtapose positive and negative views of Thatcher. Occasionally we see images of IRA bombings juxtaposed with protesters railing against England's presence in Ireland and promoting compassion for Irish prisoners on hunger strikes; the Falklands War makes an appearance.

The filmmakers must think they're going for a psychological portrait of Thatcher. But shots of Streep looking resolute paired with others of her looking doubtful after she's warned that the war will cripple England's economy don't qualify as psychology. And Thatcher's relationship with Denis amounts mostly to glimpses of them dancing to ballads from *The King and I*. As for Streep, don't believe the hype: the most impressive element of her Thatcher is the makeup job.

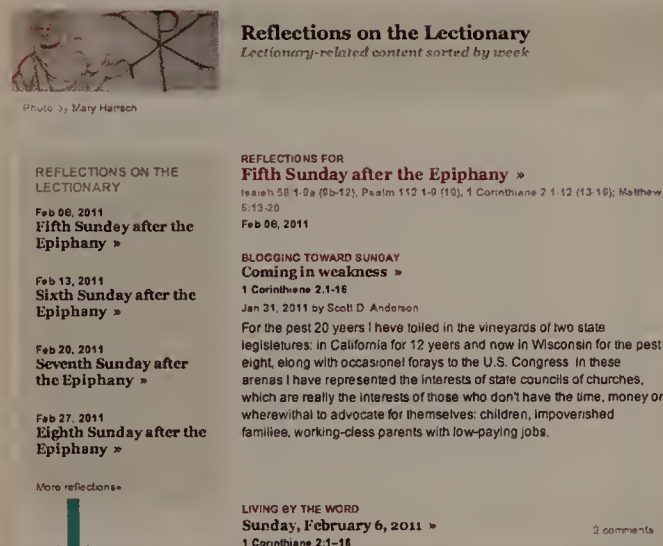
Reviewed by Steve Vineberg, who teaches at the College of the Holy Cross.

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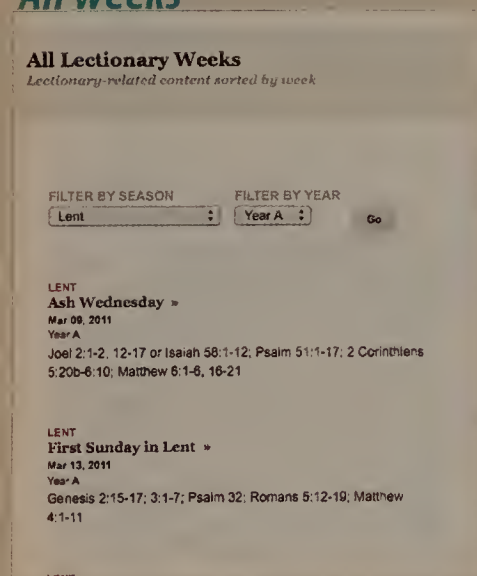
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by Rodney Clapp

Attack of the zombies

If you've been paying much attention to pop culture, you've sighted more than a few zombies. The living dead shamble ominously through comic books, books, movies, video games and television shows. Their movie appearances include dramas and even a few comedies. They've appeared in literature with mashups of zombies and characters from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. On television, they are the subject of AMC's series *The Walking Dead*.

The zombie genre is maturing. All zombie plots still include great hordes of the stalking dead, with heroes who hold off the hordes with guns, axes, shovels and what-

zombies now enjoy. But there are other things going on that give them resonance in our culture. One factor is simply how crowded our world and lives have become. In traditional cultures, the ordinary person encountered no more than a dozen or so people each day, and these were almost always familiar faces. Our urban and suburban routines, however, bring us into contact with scores of people each day—not just family but workmates and a slew of unfamiliar faces belonging to cashiers, gas station attendants, tollbooth operators,

We know that real people are behind the onslaught of messages, petitions, political organizations, charities and assorted screams for attention that we encounter. But the real people are well concealed. In this regard, it feels like we are being attacked by zombies. The messages we receive seem to have no soul or life. They are relentless. They appear in hordes. And very often the only way to survive them is by eliminating them as fast as possible. Thankfully, we can use delete buttons and not bloody axes.

seen to be on the side of death.

Of course, it's even easier to dehumanize and demonize those who were never close to us. The other who is of a different religion or race is all too easily regarded as a zombie, as a member of huge, senseless, unrelenting forces that keep advancing threateningly on us and our way of life. The opposite of a way of life is the way of death, and so we are constantly under pressure from the living dead.

At least one other factor makes the zombie meme resonant and appealing. That is the constant threat of contagion. We know enough about invisible microbes that can make us sick unto death for contagion to loom as a dark possibility in our crowded, divisive world. Here the genre of zombie tales merges with straight-on medical horror stories about real-life epidemics, as in the recent movie *Contagion*.

A zombie's bite means contagion and becoming one of the undead. The ultimate threat of zombies, then, is not just that they can destroy, but that they can make us just like them—soulless, brutish, a mindless part of the struggling masses that advance on us from every side. In such ways, the zombie fictions speak to our all too real fears.

The opposite of a way of life is the zombies' way of death.

ever other bludgeoning instruments come to hand (it is not a genre for the weak of stomach). But productions such as *The Walking Dead* focus more on the drama and dilemmas of the living than on the spectacular destruction of the undead. What do you do if a zombie is your son or spouse or great aunt? Is a world overrun by zombies a world that children should be born into? How can the living remain human and humane when they regularly must destroy zombies?

The maturation of the genre helps to account for some of the popularity that

baggage handlers and restaurant staff.

Add to this the multitudinous daily contacts we have with people via television, radio, e-mail and the Internet. No matter how assiduously we work at keeping up, the e-mails endlessly mount, the magazines and newspapers keep rolling off the presses, the new blogs keep getting created. And much of this contact takes the form of junk mail or junk e-mail—messages coming at us from no discernible persons but from (apparently) soulless corporations and other agencies.

Some other conditions make us feel besieged by zombie-like forces. Since the 1970s, our politics have become increasingly divisive and heated. Demonization and dehumanization of political opponents is common. And sometimes those who "turn against us" are those who were formerly close friends and even family members. They are like us in many ways, but somehow they are on the wrong side and even seem to lack part of their soul. They are apparently alive but in key ways are

Rodney Clapp's Soundings column appears in every other issue.

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ON Art



A Community of Believers, by Wayne Adams

Brooklyn-based painter Wayne Adams's large canvas (48"x 60") explores the theme of Christian community. Vibrantly colored triangles float over an ethereal surface that seems to be undulating in the background. The sharp geometric shapes emit a soft glow and stretch toward each other across the muted ground, as if to suggest the necessity for and power of community amid such a vast space.

—Lois Huey-Heck

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